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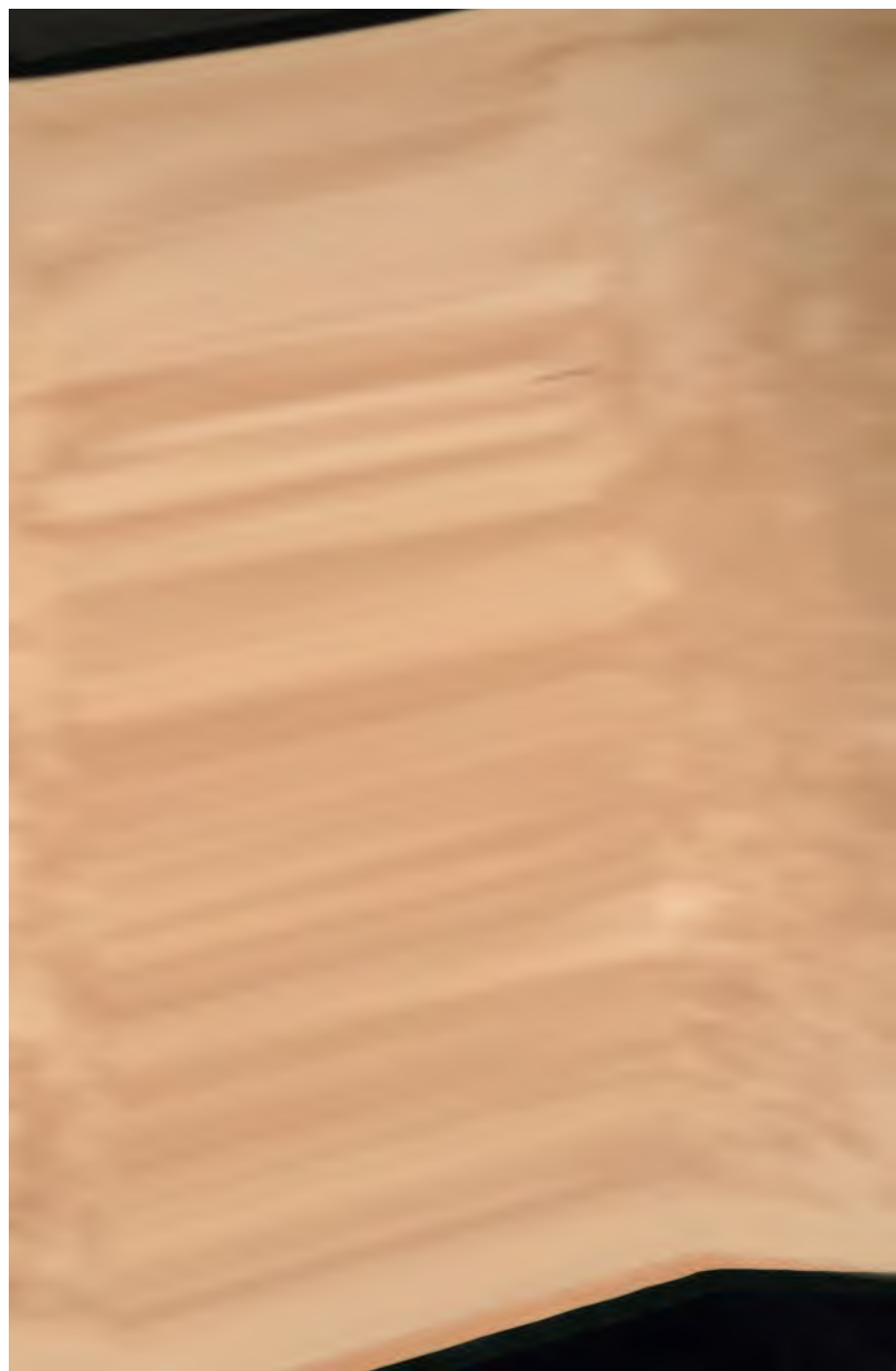




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A PASSION IN TATTERS.

A PASSION IN TATTERS.

A Novel.

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP.)

AUTHOR OF "DENNIS DONNE," "THE DOWER HOUSE," ETC.

"Love's a tyrant and a slave,
A torment and a treasure;
Having it, we know no peace—
Wanting it, no pleasure."
Elizabeth Philp.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A PASSION IN TATTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE season was closing fast, and people who had patiently fried and broiled while it was the fashion to do so, found London unendurable simultaneously, and fled into divers parts of the world in search of fresh air, fresh scenes, and fresh excitement.

Sir Roland and Miss Huntingdon had been down in Devon in their new home for a fortnight, and during that period friendly little letters, full of exquisitely touched descriptions of the scenery around Clyst Abbott, as their old manor-house was called, came from Ethel to Arthur Carhayes.

"She writes very prettily," he said to his wife, when he had finished reading the first of these effusions.

The pair were on uncomfortable terms still. Stella had not the faintest notion that her husband's coolness to her arose from his sense of wrong about these

imaginary meetings between Rupert and herself; therefore, in her ignorance of this primary cause for the estrangement, she conceived one out of her own consciousness, and made up her mind that it was Ethel—Ethel, “the wicked little flirt whom he wouldn’t marry when he could”—who was alienating him.

“She writes very prettily—Ethel Huntingdon writes very prettily. Would you like to read a vigorous little sketch she has written of their neighbourhood and their neighbours?”

He half held the letter out to her as he spoke, and then, though her heart was not her husband’s, the demon jealousy entered it on his account. She made no movement to take the letter; she resolved that she would betray neither anger, interest, nor surprise about Miss Huntingdon and Miss Huntingdon’s audacity.

“Thank you,” she said, “if I have time.” And he put it down on the table, from which she never attempted to move it.

After this he made no mention of Ethel’s letters, though if he chanced to be breakfasting with her he read them openly enough before her, and so matters had gone on for a fortnight.

The date of the Carhayeses’ going down to Carhayes Place was definitely fixed, and their mother was ready to go with them, and in the hearts of both

husband and wife there lived a hope that this bitterness would be cast out when they came to be thrown together in their own quiet country home.

At this juncture Stella would have forfeited half her fortune to be able to speak freely to her husband. But her tongue was tied by the cord that is the hardest of all to be loosed, a sense of injustice. Day after day she prayed that some opening might be made which might enable her to tell him something which she could not bring herself to tell him in cold blood and without encouragement.

And this something was that Rupert Lyon, the man who had been as a brother to him, was in very sad straits. For a report had reached her through some indifferent channel that the artist, who lived by his art, was not able to pursue it now, being ill, if not unto death, at least unto incapability.

And she, hearing this, and knowing that he was poor, and remembering that she was endowed with wealth that she had once hoped might be his, was tongue-tied on the subject, because it was palpable to her that Arthur had conceived a hatred and aversion to his name.

She made an effort to break through the ice by speaking to Arthur's mother. But Arthur's mother was insatiable as regarded the claims of her son, and thought that these had been lightly esteemed enough

already on account of that "plain dark-faced man, in whom she could never see anything marvellous."

Stella entered upon the subject the day before they were to leave town, subtly using flattery as her agent.

"Mother dear," she said, "you are so sensible, and so kind-hearted too, that I feel as if I could say anything to you. I have heard news about Mr. Lyon that has made me feel very unhappy."

"My dear Stella, I am sick of Mr. Lyon's name," the old lady replied, with a heightened colour.

"But I have heard he is ill," Stella urged.

"He has a wife to nurse him."

"But, mamma, you know—or don't you know?—that he is very poor; and now that he can't work I hear that he is getting into difficulties," and young Mrs. Carhayes gulped down a sob with a mighty effort as she spoke.

"Well, my dear, we know that you can't rush to the rescue every time he has an influenza cold, that is certain," Mrs. Carhayes said, calmly; and Stella knew that it was hopeless trying to extract sympathy for a man, however fallen, who had once been chosen before Arthur.

On the morning of their leaving town Arthur Carhayes had another letter from Clyst Abbott, but this time it was from Sir Roland.

"You would be doing me a great favour," the old

gentleman wrote, "if you would take us on your way down to Cornwall and spend a few days with us. I know you are a capital farmer—Ethel has called my attention to sundry pamphlets that you have written—and, as I think of taking the land into my own hands, I want a few words of advice. If Mrs. Carhayes will accompany you, we shall be charmed to see her."

This letter, without a single misgiving, Arthur put into his wife's hands, hoping rather wistfully that she would accept the invitation. But Stella had an antipathy to the Huntingdons by this time. She dated her husband's changed manner from the time of his coming under Miss Ethel's influence, and so she had no inclination to trust herself to the tender mercies of Miss Ethel as a hostess.

"It is utterly impossible that I go there with you, Arthur," she said; "I can't allow your mother to go on, as our visitor, alone."

"Poor old fellow, I should like to see what he wants to be at," Mr. Carhayes said, cordially; "I should be sorry for him to ruin himself by amateur farming now."

"As it is the first time in his life that he has ever thought of doing anything good and useful, according to what I have heard, let us hope that the scheme may prosper," Stella said with a little curl of the lip and a

little infusion of bitterness into the tone, both of which accompaniments to her opinion would have been absent if she had not distrusted Ethel.

Mr. Carhayes had to take a branch line from one of the principal stations in South Devon in order to get to Clyst Abbott. He had scarcely got over his chagrin at the coldness of his wife's adieux to him, when with a snort and a scream the engine came to a stand-still, and the words "Any one for St. Abbott?" in the vulgar tongue of the country, told him that he had arrived at his destination.

A primitive little country station, with a narrow platform, up to the very edge of which the autumn flowers were blooming freely. The gallant sword-flower the gladiolus, and the richly hued geraniums and asters, looked wonderfully fair and bright under the blue haze which is apt to hang over everything towards the evening hour, in this fair western land to which Nature has been so beneficent. But brighter than any flower on the platform were the kindling, eager, brilliant eyes of the young lady who was awaiting the possible "passengers by this train" in the road outside the station.

She was established by the hedge-row, out of the way of the traffic of the country-road, in a low four-wheeled dog-cart—a tiny toy of a thing that did not look in the least fast or masculine—drawn by a

couple of the clever, clean-limbed strong ponies of the moor. She and her dog-cart and ponies stood out clearly against the undertone of "blue bloom" in the atmosphere—clearly and harmoniously as if the colours had just been laid on—they in the bravery and glitter of much grooming and polishing, she in her "Dolly Varden" dress and her ecstatic spirits.

She sent her little groom round to look after Mr. Carhayes' luggage, and gave him the very perfection of a welcome.

"I do all sorts of things now," she explained; "I feed the poultry, and see to my ponies being groomed, and fetch everything that is wanted at Clyst Abbott; so as you are much wanted at Clyst Abbott I have fetched you."

"That is very kind of you. You have given me an insight at once into the picturesque sort of life you lead; how do you like it?"

"I love it," she answered warmly. Then the boy came back with the bag, and the handsome gentleman, who was already spoken of on the platform as "Miss Huntingdon's gentleman," stepped into the dog-cart, and deft Ethel whipped her ponies round, and drove them home rapidly.

"I love it," she repeated rather abruptly, breaking the silence which had set in at starting. "There is only one thing worries me, and that is the

feeling that papa will play a game of chance even with this place. He wants to farm it; now won't he burn his fingers if he begins that?"

"I hope to Heaven not—for your sake."

She moved her head impatiently.

"That is very kind of you in words, but I want you to be kind in deed. My father has no perseverance, no fund of patience to fall back upon when he fails in anything, no practical knowledge of farming in any one of its branches; yet out of the hands of men who have cultivated it for forty years he means to take the land that let as it is, will support us well. Now I want you to stop this."

"I fear I have not sufficient influence with your father to do as you wish," he said in some embarrassment.

"Then you must get the influence—for my sake," she said, bringing her ponies to a walk with rather a strong hand. "Think of the way I have been knocked about all my life, and then you will understand how I cling to my present fastness. Don't let my father risk it. Yours is the stronger mind—for my sake, do teach him prudence."

How highly she thought of him to be sure! It was flattering to him; married man as he was, and therefore debarred from the possibility of rewarding her as girls often expect to be rewarded for their

flatteries—namely, by an offer of the flattered one's hand and heart; it was very flattering to him, this entire reliance on his judgment.

"I will do all I can, Miss Huntingdon."

"Why don't you call me Ethel? Surely we are intimate enough to dispense with the stiff 'Miss Huntingdon' or—wouldn't your wife like it?"

The sudden rush of warm blood to her face as she asked the question distressed him more than the question itself.

"I am sure my wife wouldn't mind it in the least."

"Then call me Ethel only and always from this time forth. This evening, when we have dined and papa is taking his nap, I shall get courage out in the half-light to confide something else to you besides my doubts of papa's prudence; will you listen to me and advise me?"

She asked it with so winsome a smile lighting up her eager face, that the thought crossed his mind—"She has got engaged, and is going to ask me if it is to a good man. Won't the little witch wax wroth if I tell her no!"

"Clyst Abbott is rather remote from the seductions of a railway station, isn't it?" he said, presently, and she seemed to take it as a hint to drive faster, for the next moment her ponies were in

a swinging trot that soon carried them to their goal.

Through a village street—a picturesque, thinly populated village street—with a well on one side of it, and in the middle a big spreading elm tree; then through the wide-open gates of an old-fashioned garden, surrounded by high walls overgrown with ivy, and flaming now with the bright orange crimson leaves of a Virginian creeper; past the corner of the house in which the latticed pantry window looked out under overhanging masses of clematis and jessamine; and so round to the front of the house, which opened on to a terrace sheltered by big arbutus and laurel trees, exquisitely sweet now in the dying year with odours of late roses and masses of mignonette and French honeysuckle.

“What a sweet old home you have, Ethel!” Mr. Carhayes said, as he walked up the laurel-bordered steps and glanced over the front of the creeper-covered house—a moderate-sized dear old unpretentious granite house, that looked as if people had been born and lived and died in it.

“You must aid me to keep it,” Ethel whispered. “It has come to us by special grace; it would be an indelible disgrace to us wild Huntingdons if we lost it as we have everything else.”

“This is my special province,” the girl added with

pride, opening a door on the left of the narrow lobby entrance, and ushering him into a fair-sized room, the dark antique furniture of which Ethel had lightened already by her exquisite taste in the disposition of flowers—"this is my special province; and here, with your help, I shall carry out my scheme."

She pointed as she spoke to an old-fashioned combination of *escritoire* and writing-desk that occupied one corner. The bookcases on either side of the fire-place were well filled. A huge wickerwork erection in the centre of the room, on the polished floor, occupied the position too often filled by a round table. And this wickerwork erection was wreathed with flowers that diffused their fragrance liberally, and added to the impression of peace and plenteousness which the room had already made on him.

Sir Roland came in, with a small spade in his hand, without which he was rarely seen now. He could not get the land into his own hands until the following Michaelmas, but he walked about it incessantly, and prodded up thistles, and felt that by so doing he was getting it into admirable order.

"An active-minded man can't live without occupation," he began explaining to Arthur. "I am glad you have come, Carhayes. By the way, Mrs. Carhayes, I am sorry to see——"

"Is not here," Arthur interrupted, hastily; "my wife was compelled to go on to Carhayes Place with my mother, whom we had already invited when we received your invitation."

"I am sorry we hadn't a room to offer to your mother too," Ethel said, without the smallest shadow of sorrow in her face. "Now, papa, shall we have dinner?"

"You see," Sir Roland explained to his guest, as they sat over the walnuts and the wine after dinner, "this place, though it is nice enough, is small and inconvenient in many ways. For instance, there isn't a room into which I could put a second-sized billiard-table, and at present I haven't the spare cash to enlarge it. If I get the land into my own hands, I shall soon alter things. I mean to visit Mechi's place, and work on his plan."

"You will repent it if you do," Arthur expostulated, in alarm for Ethel's prospects. Poor Ethel! where would be her peace and security if her father took to importing steam ploughs and all the modern agricultural improvements on to the Clyst Abbott estate?

"Nonsense, nonsense," Sir Roland said, testily; "the soil is capable of producing enormously—we all know that; well, why doesn't it produce enormously? The obvious answer is that it is not under

proper cultivation. I shall teach the farmers in this part of the world such a lesson as will, if learned properly, double the agricultural wealth of the county. Try this claret; I am importing it myself at eighty a dozen, and I don't think you'll find a better glass of claret in the kingdom."

Mr. Carhayes tried the claret, and pitied Ethel more.

"How do you like my daughter's ponies?" Sir Roland went on. "Poor little girl, she has had some sharp experiences, young as she is, of the ills of poverty, and so now that our heads are so happily above water again she has suddenly developed a spirit of cautious economy that it is very painful to me to see in so young a girl. She wanted me to give her a rough moor pony and little basket carriage; but I was determined that Miss Huntingdon should be as well surrounded as the limited character of the place would allow. I got the whole turn-out that she is driving a great bargain. Only gave a hundred and fifty for ponies, carriage, and harness."

"I must say I admire Miss Huntingdon's prudence."

"But, my dear fellow, there is no occasion for it now—or rather, there won't be in a year or two when I have got the land in good order; and why on earth during that year or two should she cultivate

pettifogging qualities that are quite foreign to her blood? I generally go and have a look at the birds at night—I have taken the shooting into my own hands; so I will leave you now, unless you like to walk with me."

"I think I will stay and talk to Miss Huntingdon," Arthur said.

"Ah! very well; you will find her in the garden." And the old man bustled off, as eager about his game, and his land, and his projected improvements as he had been about the tables on which he had once thrown away his former possessions.

Mr. Carhayes went out on the first terrace and looked round for Ethel, but she was not there. Presently at the end he found a precipitous little path that led down to a lower terrace, along which an old-fashioned flower-bed ran from end to end. A lawn sloped away from this, and here under a Judas tree, Ethel sat with a book in her hand.

"I read till it got too dark, and then I became impatient," she exclaimed, as Arthur approached her; "the sound of a continuous grumble reached me from the dining-room, and I felt sure it was papa developing his plans for ruining us completely," she said passionately.

"Your father is very much bent on trying his hand at farming, but I think he will listen to reason," Mr.

Carhayes said, more from a desire to comfort Ethel in the present, than from an innate conviction that Sir Roland would be so untrue to his nature as to suffer himself to be guided.

"No, I fear he won't. Papa has gambled with his own property—he has gambled with me, and failed in losing me advantageously," she added, bitterly; "and now he will gamble this dear place. Oh dear! sometimes I am such a wretched girl, when this fear comes on me. I feel as if it was useless trying to be good or to do anything but drift with the stream."

"You shall not do that, Ethel." He took her hand and gave it a hearty warm reassuring pressure. "Do your best, any way, and be firm in putting down useless expenditure where you are concerned."

"You mean my ponies?" she said, quickly.

He nodded assent.

"I didn't want them, Mr. Carhayes. I hate having them while we owe such a lot of money."

"Then don't keep them; you work your will in most things, I fancy."

"No, not in the things that are nearest to me," she answered, thinking of that time when it had been her "will" that the man by her side should have been her husband, and her "fate" did not agree to it.

"But to-night I want to talk to you about myself, and not about papa and this poor place at all," she

resumed, with a swift change of manner from the depressed to the ultra sanguine. "I was trying to tell an incident of my London life in a letter to an old friend of mine in Brittany, and when I read it over, it read like a story, and on that hint I worked, at first without any other hope than that it should give me pleasure; but now, after writing many stories, and finding that I read them myself by-and-by with interest, I want other people to read them—I want them published—I want to sell them, and I want you to show me the way."

"You are sighing to make yourself 'famous by your pen,'" he laughed.

"No, no—don't think me a fool; I gauge myself and my own powers rather correctly, I fancy. You have already taught me a lesson—shall I be frank and say how? Yes, I will. Until I knew you I thought I could bring any man to my feet, but I tried hard and you wouldn't come, and after that I am not likely to make mistakes about such a little thing as my writing."

Mrs. Grundy and Co. would have despised this girl on the strength of her ample confession. Arthur Carhayes looked further into causes than the admirable firm mentioned, and knew that the self-accused are not always guilty. Waiving the question of that former failure of hers altogether, he confined himself

entirely to the consideration of her present projected attempt.

"If you begin, are you prepared to go on in the face of disappointment? Will you forgive me for giving you such aid and encouragement as I can if finally you are one of the many who fail?"

"What an unjust idiot you think me, when you can ask such a question!" she said, calmly. "On my head be it, whatever it is—all the glory if I succeed, all the obloquy if I fail. All I want from you is to advise as to the way of beginning. Shall I hurl myself at a publisher by letter or in person; shall I say what I have to say in brief or in three volumes?"

"My dear Miss Huntingdon, you seem to think it all easy."

"I may seem to think so, but I don't; I only want you to understand that I don't fear my fate too much, whatever it may be."

"At any rate don't hurl yourself at a publisher in person," Arthur said, with a man's dislike to publicity for any of the womankind in whom he takes any special interest; "wait and think it over, Ethel. You are but a girl; and don't you think this enthusiasm for writing may be only another form of the enthusiasm which drives so many women into a state of religious dementia? You too may waste your life

on an idea—the idea that you are marking an epoch in literature by your writings, or that you are conducing to the good of your fellow-creatures by them.”

“Any way I won’t canonize dissipation and immorality, and—and the sort of thing I have seen a good deal of,” Ethel said with kindling cheeks. “I can write stories that don’t hitch, Mr. Carhayes, without the aid of such women and men as some women, who have been very much better nurtured than I have been, see fit to press into their service. I can write them—and I will write them; and if you won’t give me the practical aid I asked for, I’ll—try to find some other man to whom to apply, with the same sure feeling I had about you, that at least you wouldn’t misunderstand me.”

“Nor do I, Ethel,” he said heartily; “and if you are in earnest—I mean, as you are in earnest—from this moment I shall watch with the greatest interest for the appearance of the new star on the literary horizon, but in the meantime don’t indulge yourself in that awful delusion that you are going to do it at once——”

“As if I even thought it could be done without trouble!” she interrupted.

“It is not only that you will be the slave of trouble—or toil rather, to speak with more precision—but you will be the slave of time too; you will have to

wait on this and that until your heart will often fail you——”

“And when it fails me, I will look at this house that I want to keep—at this bit of safe standing ground, where I want to stay—and I will bide my time, oh ! so patiently.”

She spoke out her words in a bright, brave, incisive way that made him feel that she meant them thoroughly. But the next moment she spoke out something else in a way that made him feel that she meant it thoroughly also.

“And when I am working as a worker in that way, Mr. Carhayes, I shall feel ever so much more as if I had something in common with you ; and that will be a feeling that I won't relinquish lightly.”

“I will look upon you as my literary daughter.”

“That is utter bosh—utter, utter bosh ! your literary sister if you like ; if you had been old enough, sir, to inspire the filial feeling, I doubt—yes, I doubt if I should ever have applied to you for aid at all.”

Silence for some minutes after this, he wondering whether this audaciously truthful girl was quite a responsible creature, she thinking what a pity it was this man had a wife who, it was publicly believed, did not understand or appreciate him.

Before censuring this waif and stray—this innocent Bohemian—the fact must be called to mind that many

admirably disposed and excellently conducted young ladies do the same daily. Don't the great majority of girls (not to put too fine a point upon it) "cry havoc and let loose" such dogs of war as they possess upon the wives of the men they themselves (the girls) have wanted to marry?

CHAPTER II.

STELLA at home, in her own house, with her mother-in-law to entertain, and her husband away—Stella, with this weight of guilt upon her head, that she had suffered her husband to go away from her in coldness, was a most unhappy woman.

Old Mrs. Carhayes, by lamenting his intimacy with the Huntingdons, had added to Stella's inquietude at first when Arthur left them.

"He is a bad acquaintance for Arthur, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he has only got up this story about wanting advice about farming in order to get Arthur there to play," the old lady said, shaking her head in reprobation, not so much of what Sir Roland had done as of what he might do.

"Arthur can take care of himself, I should think," Stella answered indifferently. The train had come out from the station, and the line curved round in such a way as to give her a full view of Miss Huntingdon and her ponies. "I hope his mother won't

see that," she thought, but the hope was a vain one. Mrs. Carhayes was lynx-eyed about the shortcomings of young ladies who were not favourites of hers.

"Well, indeed, Miss Huntingdon seems resolved to keep up the family character; why couldn't she have sent a groom, instead of coming herself to meet a gentleman guest?"

"I suppose she thought she would meet me also," Stella said, offering the excuse that she did not feel existed, out of her strong sense of how much toleration was due from her to other erring mortals; "besides, I fancy they are people who allow themselves considerable latitude in the country; she has not been rigorously brought up."

"Not decently brought up, I should say," the mother interrupted. "I should have thought that old goose Sir Roland would have had more regard for his daughter than to allow her to commence her career in a new neighbourhood by outraging people's ideas of propriety; he ought to know, too, that Devonshire people are very conservative in their opinions about women and the amount of freedom ceded to them. Miss Huntingdon will find herself very coldly looked upon in the county if she doesn't take care."

Stella smiled.

"Do you know," she said, "that Ethel Huntingdon

would care as little for being cut by people as she would for their notice? She is a daring, defiant girl, and I don't like her too well; but I do believe this good of her, that she would not trim her sails to the wind of popular opinion at all; she is a degree too brave, and frank, and careless for that."

"My dear Stella, girls cannot venture to disregard public opinion; it would be an awful thing if they could, and the girls of the period would be much worse than the majority of them are. It is to be hoped that neither Arthur nor you will be so lenient by-and-by when you have daughters of your own."

And to this, the first allusion his mother had ever permitted herself to make to the probability of their having children, Stella made no answer. She turned her face resolutely to the window, and looked over the expanse of hill and dale, of wood and water, that stretched away under the hot autumn sun, and thought of Rupert Lyon ill and low-spirited in a close London house, tended by an uncongenial wife.

Two days passed, and then there came a letter from Arthur, telling them that he had intended coming home this very day, but that some work he had undertaken to assist Miss Huntingdon with, could not be completed for seven or eight days, and as he had pledged himself to aid her "in a very

noble effort she is making," he was bound to remain for that time.

Stella read the letter without a remark, and then communicated its contents without comment to his mother.

"Very odd of Arthur—very foolish of him. I fear it is as I said before, that Sir Roland has got him into the toils of play." Mrs. Carhayes, senior, spoke with considerable emphasis and irritation; but Stella was perfectly composed as she answered—

"As I said the other day, I believe Arthur to be quite capable of taking care of himself. I don't know what to do about these dinner invitations—whether to refuse them altogether, or to accept for myself."

"My dear, you can't refuse, so recently come into the county. Arthur will be home at least in time to go to two of them—he says seven or eight days."

"But I know time grows very elastic when a man has congenial occupation," Stella said, suffering herself to become bitter outwardly for a moment. "Miss Huntingdon is a clever young lady, utterly unfettered by any scruples; she will make time fly as only such girls can."

Country neighbours called upon her incessantly after the wont of the well-placed and idle; and country gossip was soon rife about the extraordinary conduct of Mr. Carhayes in staying away without his wife so

long at those dreadful Huntingdons'. For the fame of the new owner and occupants of Clyst Abbott had come down from the sister county, and with Christian fortitude people prepared for the worst that might happen there.

"A handsome young man, with such a lovely wife, to absent himself from her for the sake of remaining at the side of a fast audacious flirt like Miss Huntingdon, who, it was currently reported, openly avowed that she preferred his society to that of any possible dozen of old dowagers in the county—a girl who rode like a horse-trainer" (poor Ethel, like many another sinner, she received the severest censure for the most harmless of her doings)—"and seemed to have no lady friends."

These and sundry other speeches of a like order were uttered freely, and Stella, with a woman's quick intuition in such cases, knew that they were made, though she never heard them.

She had written to tell her husband of the dinner invitations, at the same time requesting him, in a careless kind of way, not to dream of coming home for them if it was the least inconvenient for him to do so, as she had not the faintest objection to go to them alone. And in reply he had said, as she excused him so readily, he should stay a week longer at Clyst Abbott.

The evening of the first of these dinner-parties

came in due time, and Stella dressed herself for it, and drove over to it alone. During the drive of five miles she had plenty of time to think over the different pin-pricks that she would be made to smart under this night. As in a glass, she saw the half-amused glances that would be exchanged when she entered the room alone. She almost heard the different tones in which Miss Huntingdon's beauty and peculiarities would be discussed. Some or other of the guests was sure to have a cousin, or at least an intimate friend, living near to Clyst Abbott, and quite ready to vouch for the fidelity of all the extraordinary and striking little word-paintings that were so constantly being made of Ethel Huntingdon. And she had put it out of her own power to stop it all, by saying, when she first came down, in answer to some question—

“Oh! I assure you, Miss Huntingdon is no friend of mine.”

The house at which she dined this night was the big burly mansion of a man who had made a colossal fortune by mining speculations—a quick, clever, shrewd, fussy, vulgar little man, whose big saloons and good cook and wines were only equalled by the arrogance with which he presupposed that these things were severally bigger and better than those belonging to any one else. He had an imposing library and a

fine picture gallery, and, without a particle of genuine taste for either, he patronised literature by the ton and art by the acre.

There was a large party assembled when Mrs. Carhayes entered one of the saloons, after her name had been passed through the mouths of five footmen and a butler. Her hostess, a good, kindly, unpretentious woman, with a slight air about her of being over-done and exhausted with the magnificence with which her husband would surround her, came forward, and with genuine kindness "regretted not seeing Mr. Carhayes."

"He is still staying with his friends the Huntingdons," Stella explained in her fullest, clearest tone. And not the faintest tinge of colour or the smallest show of agitation betrayed to those about her how hard the task of saying those words was, and how even harder it was to know herself the object of so much curiosity and half-contemptuous pity.

"We still wait for one or two of our friends; it is to be hoped that our little bit of fish won't be spoiled," the host, Mr. Treverner, of Treverner House, said with a little laugh at his own wit in so alluding to the *turbot à la crème*, the *saumon à la Soyé*, the *vol-au-vent* of lobster, and the late whitebait (that had come by train express) which in a short time would be handed round in solemn procession.

"And I must say," he added in his most florid

tone, "that the man we are waiting for is one that it is well worth spoiling a little bit of fish for. He is an artist, and I am one of those who honour art like that Italian fellow who picked up Titian's pencil for him. This gentleman is an old friend of your husband's, Mrs. Carhayes—Rupert Lyon; there is his signature, you see, to this letter, in which he says he is delighted to accept 'my magnificent offer.'" And, with a good deal of pomp, Mr. Treverner, as he spoke, handed Stella a letter. He was "magnificent," and he liked being called so—especially when there were many by to hear. Give the man his due, he liked it.

Stella was in for it now—in for this thing—a meeting with Rupert Lyon, which of all other things was to be avoided while avoidance was possible. But avoidance was no longer possible. She was in for it now.

"An old friend of my husband's, and an old friend of mine too," she said, in her most collected tones. "I am delighted that his talent will adorn your new gallery." And then—though the eyes of all in the room were upon her, and she knew it—she went on quietly discussing the proposed decorations for the new gallery with just the right amount of interest.

One question that was irrelevant, apparently, she could not refrain from asking—

"And how long will Mr. Rupert Lyon be with you, Mr. Treverner?"

"Three months at least," he replied. "An expensive visit it will be to me," he added, with a big laugh; "he will leave this house with some thousands in his pockets, I am thinking; but what is the use of money unless you spend it freely, I say? 'Spend freely, but never waste,' that is the Treverner motto; and though it is a new one, there are not many old ones that are better, I [reckon. You will see it even on the plates you eat your bit of dinner off; and my crest is a mining spade." And Mr. Treverner looked a challenge all round the company, which not one of them felt inclined to answer.

"Mr. Lyon."

The door opened, and he came in, seeing Stella at once as she sat in the centre of the room, the object of attention to both host and hostess.

"Ah, Lyon, glad to see you! You have come just in time to save the bit of fish from being spoilt. Well, we had better lose no more time. My dear, will you tell our friends how they are to go; I am hardly up to the proper thing to do. Mrs. Carhayes was just saying you were an old friend of hers, Lyon; perhaps you will take her. I am glad dinner is served, for I am ready for it."

And so her hand rested on Rupert's arm again.

She had given him the initiative by telling Mr. Treverner that "he (Rupert) was an old friend of hers." On that hint he determined to speak as if their last unpleasant meeting had never been.

"How is Arthur? I didn't see him when I came in."

"He is quite well; staying in Devon at present. You will see him, for I hear from Mr. Treverner that you will remain some months; is it so?"

"I suppose so," he said, drawing a long breath that was a sigh almost; "I must work, and, if uncongenial work is all that offers, I must do that."

"I think I hardly understand what the work is."

"To organise, or reorganise rather, his picture-gallery, and to make copies of several of the pictures, and to paint a few originals, I believe; but I hardly know what it is myself yet. He offers what a poor man must respond to warmly, though—splendid remuneration."

"I am glad of that," she said, under her breath, but so heartily that he looked at her for a moment—a thing he had not done before.

"After this I shall not have to suffer poverty, Mrs. Carhayes—believe that; I know you will be glad to believe it."

"I shall be happier," she said; then she added abruptly, "You have been very ill."

"So ill that my doctors told me the burden of living would soon be off my shoulders ; but, as usual, they spoke at random, and made a mistake. The men who have nothing to live for rarely die. Our enterprising host is trying to catch your attention at this moment, in order to make one of his choice remarks to you."

"Mrs. Carhayes, I shall have a great favour to ask you by-and-by—when the evening is a little older, you know ;" and it seemed to the astonished lady he addressed that the eminent art patron absolutely winked at her.

"What is the dreadful man going to say ?" she whispered, with an unpremeditated return to her old confidential manner to Rupert.

"I think I can guess. For Heaven's sake, don't agree to his proposition, if it is annoying to you," he answered. "He wants a copy of one of your pictures—a Sir Joshua, I believe—and he wants me to do it. Now do you see ?"

"Yes, I see," Stella said, softly, as all the possibilities of the case presented themselves to her mental vision. It would be very sweetly pleasant to have Rupert Lyon at Carhayes Place in open friendship again. The fine edge of the feeling that it would be well for her never to hold further communication with him, had gone off during these days of Arthur's absence at Clyst Abbott.

"I see; and I am sure neither I nor my husband will have the slightest objection to Mr. Traverer possessing a copy, especially if you are the copyist." Mrs. Carhayes found that two or three people on her left were trying to listen to her conversation with the artist. "No one shall be able to say that I pretended to be cool with him," she thought.

The conversation to which those who were eager for information listened so eagerly, did not flow easily. By mutual consent it seemed that they both avoided all mention of his wife; and Arthur's name, though each would utter it, did not fall glibly from their lips.

"When is Archie coming home, Mrs. Carhayes?"

"When? Really I can hardly tell you," she replied, with a sudden vexatious recollection of Ethel Huntingdon.

"I had no notion that Carhayes Place was near to Treverner."

"It is five miles away."

"That is near, for the country—near enough for Archie not to look upon me as an intrusive outsider if I ride away from the Treverner banquets sometimes and cast myself on your hospitality."

"Yes. I may say 'Yes' with perfect safety," she said, turning her face towards him; and the "immense attention Mrs. Carhayes paid to a man who painted"

came in providentially as a topic for some time after this memorable dinner.

The inevitable after-dinner hour arrived, the hour that is so full of holy calm for sweet woman left to her own devices and the lovingkindnesses of any number of her female fellow-creatures. The good-natured, unsuspicious, uncommonly obtuse hostess approached Stella first.

"Really we were quite glad, Mrs. Carhayes, to find that Mr. Lyon and you knew each other so well; it made it quite pleasant for me, I am sure, to feel that two people at least were happy. I often say to my husband, when I see our friends looking cold and dull about our table, that it hurts me more than it did in times past to go without a dinner."

Trains rustled, and fans were furled, and a few Grecian bending dames advanced to the fore to have a tilt with this sentiment. Amidst any number of "Oh! my dear Mrs. Treverner! dull at your table; such a thing never was!" &c., &c., one voice made itself heard clearly.

"I am sure I have never seen warmer or more animated converse round a dinner table than I have seen to-day. It was delightful to listen to Mr. Lyon; celebrities are so seldom willing, I think, to be as socially painstaking as Mr. Lyon was to-day. I have had the pleasure of seeing your husband within the

last few days, Mrs. Carhayes. I little thought so soon to have the additional pleasure of meeting his wife."

To this speech, spoken in the suavest tone, and accompanied by a series of mechanical smiles, by an elderly maiden lady, the soles of whose feet had a restless itching to attain standing ground in other people's houses, Stella could not bring herself to return any other than "Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed; I was at an otter-hunt on the Erme," the ancient virgin pursued, with a vivacious flutter that was meant to be expressive of any amount of joy in the chase—"I was at an otter-hunt on the Erme, a lovely picturesque river that runs close to Clyst Abbott—the late poor dear Miss Huntingdon's place" (this with a sudden elongation of the countenance and corresponding elongation of the notes in the sentence). "You didn't know poor dear Miss Huntingdon, Mrs. Treverner? That was a loss; quite a character she was. I had the privilege of knowing her very intimately, and I know this—that she would never have left her property as she has left it, if she had known what I know."

"Dear me, why not?" simple, kindly Mrs. Treverner asked, with that assumption of interest in something they do not care a fraction about which simple, kindly people are apt to portray.

The lady sighed suggestively.

"I never wish to say anything about anybody, you know that, Mrs. Treverner."

"Most good-natured, I am sure," poor Mrs. Treverner simpered.

"But of course, visiting as I was visiting, quite in the county set in that neighbourhood, it was absolutely unavoidable my hearing things that are said of people occupying the position the Clyst Abbott people occupy; still in mixed society one cannot be too careful what one says."

"I don't think they have any friends here," Mrs. Treverner said, smiling blandly; and she was right. The abused absent very rarely "have any friends here."

"Well then," the other went on, confidentially, "they say that Miss Huntingdon does——"

"They say, probably, many things that are not true," Stella said, ruthlessly cutting into the discussion. "My husband is staying at Clyst Abbott, as I think you remarked to me just now," she continued, firing this last shot well into the loquacious lady; "that of course would be reason sufficient for your not repeating idle gossip about them before me, though they have no friends here."

"What a temper that Mrs. Carhayes has, to be sure!" the baffled newsvender whispered to her

hostess, as Stella moved away to another group. "I am sure, if she knew the things that are said about Miss Huntingdon's goings on with Mr. Carhayes, she wouldn't have stood up for them so; but there is always something behind that veil of indifference. Depend upon it, she carries on her own game as well as he does his."

"I never heard a word breathed about Mrs. Carhayes"—Mrs. Treverner was charity itself, and, moreover, had a great admiration for the young married lady in question—"never a word breathed about her;" she repeated more emphatically, "except——" She checked herself abruptly, in some confusion.

"Except what?" How sharply, to be sure, the other pounced down upon that one little word!

"Oh, nothing."

"What was it? I am sure, of course, it could have been nothing bad; and yet you half make me suspicious by so resolutely closing your lips after letting fall a hint. Now I am certain you are the last person in the world to make mischief; but, take my word for it, it is the hints that are let fall that do the damage where women are concerned, not the outspoken statements. I always was outspoken myself, for I know the danger of the other course."

Thus goaded on, Mrs. Treverner most reluctantly confessed that what she had been going to say, and

what she felt she would much rather not say, was, that there had been a rumour that Mrs. Carhayes, before her marriage, had been attached to some one else. "But, law, we all were that, I suppose," the good-natured woman pursued, simply.

"Oh! nothing at all unusual in that," the other one said, insinuatingly; "did you ever chance to hear the gentleman's name?"

"No," Mrs. Treverner said, plumply, blushing a rosy red over her kind old face as she uttered her little lie. For she had heard the gentleman's name, and had been pitying Stella all the evening for this enforced meeting with her old love. But not for the world would she have whispered it, even to her own husband, for fear of its getting winded abroad and blowing blightingly on young Mrs. Carhayes.

Presently a few men—and a few only, for it was the fashion at Treverner House to revel late and long—came in, and Rupert Lyon was one of them.

It chanced that the lady who had been otter-hunting in the Huntingdons' part of Devon was stranded on an ottoman in the middle of the room by herself, when this diversion of the men's coming in occurred, and at once she pounced upon Rupert.

She was one of those unfortunates who love society, and will go into it without being able to make any adequate return to it for the joy it affords them. In

other words, she could not pay her "shot." She had neither fame, beauty, brains, nor money; and one of these four things society demands from those to whom it extends its favours. Accordingly, this lady being devoid of all these essentials, drifted about on the surface of it, almost openly regarded as a bore of colossal magnitude.

She pounced on Rupert Lyon now with a smirk and a sentence that he was obliged to answer.

"I had the pleasure of seeing many of your pictures when I was in town this summer, Mr. Lyon; and I thought them very pretty—very pretty indeed."

"Did you really? I am so much obliged to you," Rupert said, in a meaningless tone; her remark being one of an order that very often drives clever artists to the verge of imbecility.

"Now do tell me" (this in a confidential undertone), "do you think that lady over there—Mrs. Carhayes—so very pretty? I am anxious to hear an artist's opinion about her looks."

"I think her the very perfection of womanly loveliness," he said, turning his head slowly, and feasting his eyes once more on the (to him) matchless beauty of the "Belle-Aurore."

"Dear me, do you? So does not her husband, I am given to understand." This with a gay and girlish giggle that longed to make him say—

"You who have nearly run your race ought to be more merciful to those who are just starting."

But he did not say this. He only turned round flushed and half frowning, and the lady accepted the look as one of interrogation.

"Well, I have been staying in the south of Devon, near to a place called Clyst Abbott, which has lately come into the possession of some people of the name of Huntingdon, and I assure you people think it very odd that Mr. Carhayes should stay there so long as the guest of the fascinating Miss Huntingdon."

"People say any amount of foolery on every possible subject," he answered, curtly. "Mr. Carhayes is one of the best fellows in the world; and being the husband of the loveliest woman in it, I can only suppose that there is a good deal of insanity rife in the quarter you speak of."

With that he left the lady on her ottoman in all the glory of isolation, and with a sense of being snubbed upon her—a feeling which caused her to speak of him at large for the future as "a person who paints pretty well, I believe, but evidently one quite unaccustomed to society; he contradicted me about a well-known fact quite flatly."

He had contradicted her flatly, and in the spirit he believed that his contradiction of that which she implied was a genuine thing. Still, for all this belief, he

could not help thinking that it was a pity Arthur Carhayes kept up an intimacy with the Clyst Abbott people that was not shared by his wife.

"Hers is just the nature to resent being pitied by the world," he said to himself, as he looked at her and noted that there were lines of care about her mouth and eyes that had not been there before her marriage. There was another expression, too, on her face which he regretted to see there. The bright, frank, high-hearted look was gone, and a fretful, troubled one had come in its place. Well, he was a married man, and it did not do for him to stand there thinking of what might have been.

Mr. Treverner was speaking to her at the moment—asking his favour probably: at any rate, as Stella replied, the fretful look vanished, and a glowing bright one reigned in its stead. Rupert, watching her with a vision rendered keen by art and love, saw the old well-remembered soft droop of the eyelids over eyes that looked happy for an instant—saw the faint, pleased quiver of the lips—heard the clear ringing incisive tones.

"I shall be delighted to see Mr. Lyon at Carhayes, and if there are any other pictures in our place that you would like a copy of, pray say so."

"Well, well, I will have a look, and if you really don't mind it, Mrs. Carhayes, I may presume on your

good-nature; at any rate, Lyon and I will ride over to-morrow."

This her host said as Mrs. Carhayes rose and said "Good night," and the next moment she was passing Rupert.

"Good night," she muttered, without extending her hand.

"May I not see you to your carriage?"

She bent her head a little in assent, and he led her down the long corridor and longer staircase and through the hall without a word. When he had handed her into the carriage, she leant forward and asked suddenly—

"Why don't you say something?—why don't you say that you will be glad to come to the old place again?"

"I am not glad." He spoke very sadly, and she answered his thought, not his words.

"A week before I left London I should have been sorry too, or rather I should have said 'No' when Mr. Treverner asked me; but a week works wonderful changes sometimes."

"I should be sorry indeed for you to change in anything." Then he stood back and the carriage drove off, and the woman in it buried her face in her hands and made her moan over the mistakes of her life.

CHAPTER III.

It was hard the following morning to preserve an appearance of unconsciousness and ease before her mother-in-law, when that lady cheerfully questioned about the Treverner banquet.

"I suppose you didn't find it very lively, Stella; with all their money, they have not quite got into your set yet. Did you know any one?"

"Yes," Stella said, with an effort, "it was pleasant enough; they are not refined, but they are so genuinely good-natured and kind, especially Mrs. Treverner, that I can't help liking them."

Then she set about thinking how she should best introduce Mr. Lyon's name—that name that was ever in her heart and so rarely on her lips now. How should she broach it? Mrs. Carhayes, senior, innocently paved the way.

"I suppose they are making the house a combination of palace and museum, are they not?" she asked, laughing.

Stella essayed a smile.

"Mr. Treverner seems bent on a gorgeous picture gallery, and he has got Mr. Lyon down to reorganise it." She scampered through the sentence, but her voice gave an ominous fall at the end of it.

"You don't mean to say you met Mr. Lyon there last night, my dear?"

"Yes."

"Dear me!" the old lady said, thoughtfully; and, without design, her eyes rested on Stella's face until the latter's colour rose freely — she thought her mother-in-law was scanning her face for her feelings.

"It is awkward, his being in the neighbourhood, as the acquaintance has dropped; in London, of course, such things are never noticed; but here, in the neighbourhood, after being our guest for months, it will set idle tongues wagging and idle minds wondering about why he never comes now."

"He is coming, I believe," Stella stammered. "Mr. Treverner asked me as a favour to let him have one of the Sir Joshuas copied; and he will bring Mr. Lyon to see it."

"I wish Arthur was home," his mother sighed.

"So do I," Stella said, almost fiercely; "but wishing won't bring him home. Don't let us worry ourselves about what we can't help, mother dear. Let us go to the seaside to-day, and a sea-breeze may

blow away all our annoyances ; we will take books and a luncheon-basket, and have a long day on the yellow sands. Shall we ? Say 'Yes.'"

And old Mrs. Carhayes, divining that Stella's reason for being so anxious to get away from home was the probability of a visit from Mr. Lyon, said "Yes," and refrained from asking questions.

"She wants to avoid him as much as she can without making the avoidance marked," the old lady thought, approvingly. "Dear, good child ! she will always do what is right."

"Shall you be writing to Arthur before we go to-day, Stella, my dear ?"

"No."

"Won't you ?"

"No ; I wrote to him yesterday, and he might well think it a bore if I sent him a second edition of my trite remarks twenty-four hours after."

It was not the speech of a tender, loving wife ; and Mrs. Carhayes, who had been a tender, loving wife herself to Arthur's father, felt that it was not, and sighed, as much for the poor girl before her as for her son. After all, perhaps they had been too persistent—they, the masterful, omnipotent Carhayeses—in urging on this marriage.

"It doesn't do to think about," Mrs. Carhayes said to herself, nervously. "When shall we start, my

dear? Give me timely notice, for I am going to write a few lines to Arthur."

"I thought of leaving here at twelve." Stella resolutely ignored her mother-in-law's statement of intention. In her heart she was glad that her husband would hear of Rupert's being in the neighbourhood, though she could not have told him herself. But in her heart she was glad and grateful to her dear old friend for sparing her the pain.

They started at twelve; and Stella, driving briskly through the fresh Autumn air among the commons covered with gorse and heath, felt as if a load of guilt was removed from her breast. She was carrying out that plan she had formed so honestly in London—avoiding the mere sight of the man who was dearer to her than her life. She made strenuous efforts during this drive to be and to seem her old careless, happy, life-enjoying self again. The air helped her, the scenery helped, and her sympathetic companion helped her. The glorious masses of gold and purple that were grouped about in dazzling profusion gave them plenty to do and to talk about. For Stella was one of those women who can never pass flowers without picking them. So the ponies were pulled up frequently, and the mistress of them went wandering about from broom to heather, with a step so light that it surely must have betokened a light and happy heart.

"She is a girl still in the delight she takes in a stray patch of pure white or pale pink heath," the old lady thought. And then the tears came into her motherly eyes as she said to herself, "Would to Heaven she were a girl still in reality!"

The pony-carriage was a triumphal car, so wreathed was it with flowers by the time they reached the fishing village, namely two o'clock, and both ladies were ready for luncheon.

"We'll get well down among the rocks," Stella said; "I know one place where there is a regular divan of serpentine, and a dear little deep pool close to the divan where we can cool our hock."

And soon afterwards they settled themselves, and ate their luncheon, and were very peaceful.

Presently Mrs. Carhayes felt the soft, sleepy influence of the sea-air, and the book fell from her hand, and her head nodded. Stella got up and sauntered away, looking for zoophites, dabbling her fingers in the water, wondering if she had done right in coming away to-day in order to avoid Rupert Lyon. At any rate, whether or not her policy had been pure, it must be pronounced ineffectual; for before she could settle the question, she had turned under a natural arch of rocks, and after zigzagging about a little, came close upon the object of her thoughts, who sat there sketching.

"He will think that the same feeling sent me from home as kept him from calling on me to-day," was the first coherent thought that rushed through her mind; "he will know all my weakness, all my folly, all—no, he shall not."

She flung all her energies into the contest with her feelings; she overpowered and routed the latter, and advanced to the encounter cool, composed as ever Stella Orme had been—so very much depended on herself now. Curiously enough, no thought of what Arthur might think intervened to embarrass her. Her duty to herself, her duty to this man before her, to whom her weakness would prove a snare, were her two paramount considerations.

"I am relieved from some conscience smites, Mr. Lyon, by seeing you here," she said collectedly, giving him her hand; "the temptation of spending this day by the sea was too strong for my mother and myself, and so we gave ourselves the benefit of the doubt that Mr. Treverner and you would not call to-day, and came here, leaving the Sir Joshua at home though," she continued, with a pallid little effort at playfulness.

He understood and appreciated her "line" at once; and so, possessing his soul in the patience to bear and forbear with which he had been training hard all his grown-up years, he thought that the

best thing he could do would be to follow that "line" meekly.

"All our arrangements broke loose, Mrs. Carhayes. Treverner and I couldn't agree early in the morning as to what it was best to do, and you see he is a man who is accustomed to make his arrangements early in the morning. I knew that I should get some wonderful effects on this part of the coast, and so I trusted to your magnanimity to let us off the call he volunteered——"

"Oh yes, that certainly; but I didn't take it as a social call at all, you see; if I had I should have stayed at home, boring myself in the woods, instead of rejoicing among the rocks as I have been. I thought that the call was to be paid to Sir Joshua, and so I should be quite as well out of the way as in it. I might have hindered you."

The last words were no sooner out of her mouth than she repented of them. Hindered him! what meaning might he or might he not attribute to the phrase? Her face began to burn at the recollection that she had "hindered" him enough already, by putting fair dreams before him, which honour had forbidden him to realise. Her face had begun to burn, and when a woman's face is flushing with a feeling that is akin to mortification she is never at her best.

However, she struggled womanfully for that supremacy with which she had started.

"I should have been sure to have offered you feeble opinions. You know women who go in for a 'rapturous sense' of art, as I do, always do that, and often harass those at whose shrines they worship. Not that I have worshipped at anybody's shrine as yet," she continued, nervously; "but I love art in the abstract, you know, and so might have made absurd suggestions if I had stayed at home to-day, and you had kept your appointment."

For the life of her she could not help saying that with an accent of reproach.

"The appointment was made by Mr. Treverner, as you may remember," he said, coolly, and then he continued, in tones that were even still more effectually iced, "but I must confess that I was the one to break it. I knew that there would be good colour on the sea to-day, and——"

"You can see the Sir Joshua and me any day," she interrupted, bitterly. It was so hard on her: it did come upon her with all the force of an injustice, that this man whom she liked so well should even feign to be indifferent to her.

"I can see the Sir Joshua any day—but, thank Heaven, I can't see you any day," he burst out, hurriedly rising up and scattering his paraphernalia of

sketching; and then Stella remembered what was, and what was not, and collected herself sufficiently to calculate the chances of getting herself away without further consequences from this *flasco*.

"I left Mrs. Carhayes taking a doze a little way down; and in case the tide may creep up, I think I had better go and wake her up," she said, turning round towards the archway of rocks she had lately passed through.

"It is a rough, scrambling path over the boulders—shall I help you?" He could not bear the idea of leaving the delicately-shod woman to scramble about on the rough rocks alone; and yet he felt that she was infinitely wiser than he had been when she refused his proffered hand with the words—

"No, thank you; I am very sure-footed, and I have had a good deal of practice in clambering over the rocks." He was looking past her as she spoke, and she saw a sudden expression of anxiety cross his face.

"I must come with you, after all, Mrs. Carhayes, and we must go quickly; the narrow path is filling—the tide is running in fast."

The rocky elevation on which they stood was joined to the mainland by the archway of rocks only. Close up to this passage, on either side, the waves of the Atlantic rolled up; and it was only when the tide was out that the passage was available.

They were in danger, because the passage filled quickly as soon as the tide began to run in, and in that case they would be cut off from the mainland until the morning.

No fear of falling amidst the boulders now. Like a chamois, she sprang over them, straining her vision to see round impassable intervening corners of jutting rocks for a sight of the passage that could lead her out of this difficulty. Her face grew paler and paler, and he, pitying her profoundly, dared not speak to her; all attempt to comfort her, if this evil had come upon them, would be vain.

At last—only a few minutes in reality had been spent in gaining it, but it seemed to her that they had been hours in coming to the cavernous archway—at last the opening was reached, and with a sharp cry of despair Stella saw that the waves were lapping in with what looked like revengeful haste on the part of the ocean.

“We are cut off,” she said; and then her spirit broke down, and she cowered down on a ledge of rock and sobbed bitterly.

“Don’t give way, Mrs. Carhayes, for Heaven’s sake. While the light lasts there is hope that some persons may come down on the coast, and we might signal to them. Your mother will surely come along to look for you when she wakes.”

"She is just as likely to go and look for me the other way," Stella said piteously. "Oh, this horrible little island; how could you let me stay talking to you so long when you knew what might happen! No, I don't mean that—God knows, though this is utter destruction to me, I don't blame you."

"Utter destruction!" he stammered; "don't take distorted, exaggerated views. There is no danger——"

"I wish there was," she interrupted; "I wish with all my heart there was: it would be believed then that accident brought me into this position. Now——" she paused, choked by the worst fear a woman can have—the fear that her reputation is irrecoverably gone.

"Mrs. Carhayes," he said, desperately, "I will swim off and send a boat for you; so be cheered, do be brave."

"I can't be, and you shall not attempt to swim that dreadful distance."

"There is one near point," he said, scanning all that was lying between themselves and security narrowly.

"And that near point is a sheer cliff; where could you land? Are you mad, to think of it? Are you a good swimmer?"

He shook his head. "No," he said in a low voice;

"but for your sake I could do it, I know, and I will do it."

"No, Rupert, no,"—she spoke collectedly now and dried her tears—"not even for my sake; besides, you would do no good."

"How do you make out that? Granted that I got across, I could send a boat for you."

"And that would do no good," she said, boldly. "We may as well face the facts of the case, galling, crushing as they are. It must be known in any event that we have been here together; and it will be believed by many that we are here by design. Your risking your life in my service would not serve me one bit now, Rupert."

"At least Arthur will never be so madly unjust?"

"I don't know; Arthur is changed. But, whatever comes of it, whatever is said and believed, we are conscience-free, and we feel it. You know why I came away from home to-day, and I know why you did not go to my home. Fate has been very froward to us in turning our best efforts to our overthrow in this way."

She spoke rapidly and earnestly, and he saw that her colour had come again, and that her eyes were sparkling with a strange brightness.

"If she agitates herself at this rate, she will have a nervous fever," he thought; and then the fear smote

him that in her highly wrought nervous condition it might be unsafe to leave her. And with a stifled groan over his own helplessness he sat down by her side.

Presently she said—

“I was mad and wicked enough to feel just now, that if I were certain we should be drowned to-night, I should not be sorry, but I am in a better mood now. What awful misery it would cause to those we should leave, to know that we were drowned together!”

He thought he saw an opening for introducing a more hopeful view of the case than it had seemed possible for her to take before. He made haste to drive in his small wedge of consolation.

“Thank Heaven, there is no chance of our being drowned, and, as you say, you will therefore have the happiness of telling dear old Archie how it all happened. Regard it as an unpleasantness, Mrs. Carhayes, and other people will take the same view of it.”

“No, they won’t,” she said promptly; “you know the world less well than I thought you did, if you don’t feel sure in your heart that this, which we would either of us have given a year of our lives to avoid, will be regarded as a fault of mine for which I shall be punished in one way or another all my life.”

“Mrs. Carhayes, if I thought so——”

"Don't say what you would do 'if you thought so,' for you must think so if you think at all. I know what you were going to say—that it is hard to be punished when one is guiltless; but it would be so much harder to be punished if one were guilty. If we had either of us done anything underhand I think I should destroy myself now."

He was leaning forward gloomily listening to her, and thinking how good, and pure, and sweet she was. What a false-hearted world it must be that could misjudge her! What misshapen laws they must be which she could ever outrage! Was it a work of merit to keep terms with such a world and such laws?

He speculated thus for a few minutes, and then he looked at her and felt that not for his life would he allow her to know that he had so questioned and argued with himself. However false-hearted and unjust the world, however misshapen the social laws by which she must be judged, she respected the dictates of the one, and accepted the status awarded by the other.

"I have never spoken to you about my wife," he said.

"Speak about her now."

"I will speak of her as she is—I will deal only with the present. She has a hard time of it sometimes, Mrs. Carhayes. The men who surround her are not congenial to her; and you know how long a stranger is in making lady friends in London. She

lived a village life until she married, and knows and cares nothing for the art we live by, save that we do live by it. Still, will you, knowing everything you do, see her when you go back to town ? ”

“ Perhaps she will not see me,” Stella said with a heightened colour.

“ She will see you—in time she will understand you, and know you to be what I know you to be—the best woman in the world.”

“ I hope you will have children,” Stella said abruptly.

“ I do not hope it,” he said sternly.

She tried then to ask him questions about his house, and his studio, and his prospects, but the mood for speaking of what concerned himself was past, and gradually silence fell over them, and they sat for another hour, sad and speechless, watching the opposite shore with anxious eyes.

Meanwhile old Mrs. Carhayes had roused herself from her slumbers and been considerably refreshed by them.

“ I wonder which way Stella has strolled. Dear good girl, to come out of that man’s way to-day ; it shows such true delicacy of mind. I suppose she is searching for pebbles.”

On coming to this conclusion, she got up and sauntered slowly on in the direction of the village, but

saw no signs of Stella. Getting rather anxious, she turned her footsteps the other way, and walked to within half a mile of the fatal archway that was likely to prove so effectual a barrier between poor Stella and her future peace. Seeing nothing of the absentee, the old lady, now in absolute distress, made her way to the village, and sent out two or three men to look for the lost lady, while she herself sat wringing her hands and crying in a low-roofed little beach inn parlour.

CHAPTER IV.

THOSE were halcyon days for Ethel Huntingdon in which Arthur Carhayes visited at Clyst Abbott. She had never before been thrown into intimate communion with a man of such varied talents and possessed of so bright a mind, and, to use her own phrase, she "revelled in him." He had a peculiar aptitude for bringing out the best that is in a woman—the mentally best, that is—and he succeeded beyond the success that had been ceded to former efforts in this charming young example that was now set before him.

In fact, it was quite an exceptional experience for him to fail with a woman as he had failed with his wife. When friendship only had been in the case, she had responded very thrillingly and warmly, but directly he adventured love, she iced herself, and had never thawed, and so all the misery that "had been" was still.

But before Ethel Huntingdon, this bright "young

co-labourer" of his, as he delighted to call her, he carried no marks of a bruised spirit. She was so bonnily alive to all that existed between them; she entered so heartily into his aspirations, political and literary; she asked for his aid—for the aid of his experience—so prettily; what could he be but courteous and kind?

About courtesy and kindness in the abstract, there is nothing bad to be said. They are the small coin which can be exchanged anywhere with good, telling results. But against courtesy and kindness in the concrete, there are often dark marks. Women—the best type of women too—are apt to be led astray by these noblest qualities of gallantry; they are apt to think that courtesy and kindness mean more than those who develop them intend to mean; and so courtesy is considered "devotion," and kindness "love."

Ethel Huntingdon was a girl to whom circumstances had been especially kind in the way of guarding her against such mistakes; but then, on the other hand, experience had been very lax. Hitherto the girl had been free from all temptation to commit the folly of nursing unrequited love. The men she had known in her former life would have been only too glad to respond, had she but demonstrated affection for them. But they had not been of the right calibre to win such a demonstration from her. Unluckily Arthur

Carhayes was ; fortunately, however, his heart was full of his wife.

The girl was working very hard at this particular period. She was writing a realistic romance, in which she was striving to embody her own wishes and desires—in which she was striving to depict the unutterable happiness that would have been hers if Arthur Carhayes were her lover. Her heroine was herself—a portrait painted with a strong hand—and the original was not flattered. A rich, sensuous nature, a sparkling beauty, a set of circumstances that rendered the one whom they surrounded exceptionally independent, the cross of a “married woman” in the way—these were the materials she had to work with, and she manipulated them with a subtle as well as a strong hand.

Hour after hour she sat in the little room that she had arranged as a study, writing and thinking out the story of her heart. And hour after hour at the end of the day Arthur Carhayes sat there listening to her reading it. All the while he held himself blameless while this process of vivisection was going on—held himself blameless, for he had never spoken a word of love to her. Doubtless many men would hold the same opinion ; for in the nobler sex there is an immense strata of the meanness that was the prominent quality in Adam’s character. “It was the

woman tempted me," has been and will be the cry of the masculine offender under every creed.

"I have arranged every incident in my story, and the end to her must be horrible; so it is not that you may suggest alterations in it that I read it to you as I go on," she told him one day; "I do it that you may tell me whether or not I am gaining style."

"You are; you have force, and when you have had more practice you will combine grace with it, I am sure. At present there are certain passages that are rugged——"

"They are not weak?" she questioned, eagerly.

"No, they are not weak," he laughed, and added, "on the contrary, some people may think them too strong for a woman."

"I dislike such phrases from the bottom of my heart," she said, passionately; "'too strong for a woman,' 'too decided for a woman,' 'too outspoken for a woman;'" and from you, too, to be condemned to hear them—from you who hold in print that "there should be no sex in literature!"

"When I venture to offer the mildest criticism, Ethel, you take offence."

"No, I don't. When you said some passages were rugged, I resolved at once to try to smooth them; but I object to injustice, and it is unjust to say some of

my writing is 'too strong for a woman.' If a man had written it, how then?"

"It would probably be pronounced 'very good' by the unemotional, and 'powerfully thrilling' by the ecstatic reviewers."

"And women would read it?"

"Probably also."

"Oh, your half-and-half measures, how hateful they are!" she cried, impetuously; "women may read what is true, and what they think and feel, but they mustn't write it. Now, to come to the point, which is the particular passage that may be read with impunity, but that only a man ought to have written? Show it to me."

"Let us waive the point," he said, laughing.

"I will not; show it to me." She spoke imperiously, but her eyes drooped under an admiring gaze that he was permitting himself to indulge in.

He took the MS. sheets from her, and turned them over irresolutely for a time. At last he paused and read a sentence or two to himself.

"Read it out, Arthur."

"I would rather not," he said hurriedly; and then she got up and coolly looked over his shoulder.

"Oh, I see," she said, after a minute or two, "you object to my jeremiad against those who unjustly con-

damn the woman that loves a man who cannot marry her."

"Not unjustly, I think—or at least the reviews will say so, and the best reading public too. 'It is a woman's part to be wooed;' it is a woman's duty to wait for such wooing before she surrenders her heart."

"And the wooing is always done in so many words—never in the sweeter silence, and the more seductive looks? Listen: do you believe that women box up their feelings and have them under perfect control until they are asked to marry, and that then love comes all in a moment?"

"You had better believe it, Ethel; it is the belief I should desire my daughter to hold, if I had one."

She sighed.

"And now another piece of advice, my charming fellow-labourer," he said, kindly; "don't have a 'horrible ending' to your story. There is quite enough sorrow and sin and misery in the world; let us keep it out of our books if possible."

"In fact, let us make our books as much unlike nature as possible; that will be real art, won't it! Go on."

"I will, though I know you will be angry. You have drawn a girl who will live for your readers; don't make her violate their sense of what a woman about

whom young girls will read should be. We are satiated with sinful women ; keep yours pure, Ethel."

She looked at him steadily.

"What makes you suppose I contemplate doing anything else?"

"Because—well, because you have vividly depicted a girl who does not exercise the slightest self-control. Can such a woman come to good?"

"You ask that, having just told me to make her come to good! If she cannot in the natural order of things, should I, as an artist, be justified in distorting probabilities for the sake of a virtuous section of the public who can live contentedly enough in a world of vileness, but who cannot bear to hear of it? It comes to this, Arthur—the book must end horribly, or it must be destroyed."

"Destroy it, then," he said, steadily; and Ethel burst into tears.

After all—after such encouragement as he had given her on previous occasions, when she had read portions of her work to him—to have permitted her to go on to this point, and now to crush her! It was hard, cruelly hard on the girl whose education had never taught her that it is well to undo, even to seventy times seven, if a possibility of amendment in the re-doing exists. But she had never been taught that perseverance was a better quality than white

heat. She had never learned that it is a fine thing to try and try again.

After all, we cannot always safely supplement Nature. To some it is given to do things after much working and tribulation, and to others it is given to do things well at once, or, at any rate, to do things as well as they can ever hope to do or attain to doing them. That which is by nature spasmodic, ardent, enthusiastic, cannot be done in cold blood. Ethel had flashed out a story from her brain, and it was crushed because it was expedient to crush it.

She acknowledged the expediency of it. It was borne in upon her that he was right from all right-thinking worldly people's point of view, and that she was socially wrong. But, all the same, she knew that hers was a better code of morality than his. She at least did not wish to call things that were true by false names.

"He likes to salve his conscience, and I don't care to salve mine," this Free Lance said to herself. "It is wrong, and I am sorry for it that I should be so fond of him; but all the same I can't help it; Nature is stronger than principle with me."

Ethel Huntingdon was developing. A few weeks ago she would not have acknowledged to herself that there was anything wrong in her familiar communion with Arthur Carhayes. Nor would there have been,

had she not liked him so well. And on the other hand how difficult it is to have the familiarity without the liking!

"I am sorry that I should be so fond of him." She was this, and she acknowledged it, and he at the same time was "sorry" also in a vague way, and would not acknowledge what the cause for sorrow was. He had come to Clyst Abbott a little because he was one of the men who like to be consulted. He believed that the advice he could give on every subject was the best that could be given. Therefore it appealed to his sense of his own merits as a counsellor, that knowledge he had that Sir Roland wanted to consult him about farming, and Ethel about literature.

Again, he had been a little influenced in his decision to come by the liking he had for exercising the faculty of giving great pleasure to his fellow-creatures with the greatest ease to himself. But the strongest reason of all for coming was that Stella might be punished for the reticence she had observed towards him.

The masterful element that Stella had seen in him long ago, when she told him that "he was born to succeed" in everything, had grown and strengthened prodigiously of late. It had seemed to him before his marriage that he would be satisfied when Stella was his wife, but, as soon as he had almost ~~ceased~~

her into being this, the insufficiency of it came home to him. He wanted her love and her entire confidence. The one should grow, and the other he would compel her to give him. So he told himself. It has been seen how far he had succeeded as yet.

From this statement it may be gathered that it was not altogether from want of thought that he stayed on at Clyst Abbott. Twice he had written to his wife volunteering to go home if she "wanted him, though I am of great service to Miss Huntingdon," he added. To an offer so unflatteringly weakened Stella could make but one reply: "Do not hasten your return on my account."

"I will not hold up a finger to win him from Miss Huntingdon," she said to herself. "If he had let me be Stella Orme in peace still, how I would have helped him with Ethel! But now that he has made me marry him, to go back and flaunt his devotion to her in the face of the world!—well, I for one don't blame the girl."

This sentiment had been the predominant one in Mrs. Carhayes's mind before that unlucky episode on the coast which planted her well on the horns of a cruel dilemma.

There was something in the look of reproach which gleamed out from Ethel's tearful eyes when he said,

"Destroy it then," which made her Mentor feel very pitiful. He tried to tone down and make compromises about the inevitable agony that he had recommended.

"Couldn't you carefully revise it? You know as well as I do what it would be well for you to strike out."

"Every bit of it," she interrupted.

"How hasty you are! Very far from every bit of it. There are some passages that any one might be proud of having written; but again there are others that you would feel very much ashamed of in a few years. Be guided by me; revise it carefully—deal out poetical justice liberally."

"I won't, Mr. Carhayes. Poetical justice is very rarely awarded in real life; if it was—well, I won't say all that I think on the subject, or you will imagine I am angry with you. No; my poor book shall die as it has lived—I won't mutilate it."

"When you have plied the pen a little longer, you won't so rashly condemn the labour of weeks, a whole work, to destruction, because it would be inexpedient to publish parts of it; you will respect the mere manual labour too much, to say nothing of the intellectual."

"My hand, as well as my head and heart, have ached over it often and often," she said, earnestly;

"my fingers have been cramped, and I have made a regular corn on my thumb with a nasty hard penholder ; but for all that, every line of it shall go into the fire. There is something holier in burning than in tearing it up."

"You will promise me that you will make another attempt," he said.

"Make another ! I shall make dozens," she said, emphatically ; "but I confess I shall commence the next in rather a low frame of mind. For that reason I think you are in honour bound to stay and see it started ; will you ?"

"Have you energy enough to begin again directly ?"

"Of course I have. To-night I shall begin sketching out, not the plot, but a set of characters. I shall give a week's sober and calm consideration to them, and at the end of that time I will introduce them to you in a body ; you will have been introduced to each as it is created before."

So it was arranged that he should stay another week. And when it was settled, Ethel could not even regret the death of her first literary offspring, since, as he was the cause of it, Arthur Carhayes would stay to witness the birth of the second.

Sir Roland, in anticipation of getting the land that was to be so very remunerative into his hands, had

lately been proving himself a most liberal patron of the makers of all kinds of agricultural implements. He had also imported at a heavy cost a great number of Suffolk punch horses, in order to get them well into condition before the time came when he should employ them. These purchases of his had exhausted all his ready money, and he was beginning to look gloomy, as men are apt to look directly they feel the least monetary pressure. He found fault with Ethel for extravagance in house-keeping, of which she was not guilty; and upbraided her for not paying the weekly bills when she had no money wherewith to do it.

"Let me sell my ponies and carriage, papa; that will give us ready money for a time."

"And proclaim ourselves paupers at once," he said, testily. "I shall do nothing of the kind. It is merely a temporary inconvenience that I could relieve in a few days, if I were not in such an isolated hole."

Ethel knew that the steps her father would have taken to relieve the "temporary inconvenience" would have carried him to the fatal tables, and she blessed their isolation; but at the same time she acknowledged the unpleasantness of the situation, and worked the more earnestly, in the hope of being able finally to get out of it.

"I shall borrow a few hundreds of Carhayes," Sir Roland said to her one morning, coming into her little room where she had been sitting writing for three hours.

"Oh! papa, pray don't—pray, pray don't!" she pleaded, throwing down her pen, and springing from her chair to his side. She had been working very much to her own satisfaction this morning. Her work was growing well—growing, and bearing flowers freely.

The gracefulness that Arthur Carhayes had prophesied would soon be added to her graphic force was fast becoming her portion. She loved her work—the real secret of success in any art. And the incentive of want of money was now added to her artist's desire to do her work well.

That want of money is a mighty incentive to literary work few will be found to deny, and the few who deny it have either failed to make the money, or know nothing at all about literary work. In peace and plenty it is very delightful to work at the composition of a novel—in peace and plenty, with the mind quite at ease about the future, and with no dreadful necessity before one of having to do so much by a certain time, because, if it is not done by one's self, it will be done by some prompter "other," and so the place that one has striven so hard to gain in the ever-

lasting race may be lost, and the one who loses it may perish. With none of these dreadful visions haunting one, it may be very delightfully easy to work. Nevertheless, need is *the* mighty incentive.

Poor faulty Ethel! her energies were all young, and warm, and strong. She knew nothing about suspense and defeat as yet, and so it seemed to her, when this call upon her powers was made, that she could go on answering it as long as she lived. "Borrow of Arthur Carhayes while she could write and make money?—never!"

"Pray, pray don't think of such a thing, papa. Here, see how I am getting on; and it is readable, really it is; and you know what a lot of money novelists make in these days."

He was an unpractical old sinner as regarded the management of his own affairs, but he was practical enough as soon as the question of his daughter's powers arose.

He took up some sheets of her MS. and turned them over and laughed—absolutely laughed.

"Don't, papa," she said, wincing; and then she put on a bolder front, and added, "I vow you shall not discourage me."

"You had better be looking after the affairs of the house instead of writing this stuff."

"Had I?"

"You had. Here is a butter bill come in that I can't understand."

"Can't you, father? I can, too well. I have had no money to pay for anything for weeks; all the 'looking after things' in the world wouldn't have paid that bill."

"There must be extravagance somewhere," he grumbled.

"There is not," she said, angrily. "Look at the quantity, and then say, with the household we have, if there can have been extravagance." Then she turned boldly to him and added, "It has always been your way to find fault with other people when trouble came to you, papa; you have brought this on yourself again now, and I don't blame you, for it is your nature—but bear it, as I have to bear one that I have partly brought on myself."

"Have you a trouble, child?" She was his child after all his carelessness about her, and his injustice to her. And he had thought she was such a bright cloudless creature. This announcement that she had a trouble was a rough awakening.

There was a ball in her throat for a few moments that prevented her answering him. Then she stooped down and kissed his forehead, and said—

"Pray don't borrow of Mr. Carhayes. Let me kill my trouble with hard work; and I can't work hard

if I have the mortification before me of knowing that you are indebted to him."

And Sir Roland promised, and borrowed money of Arthur that night, and salved his conscience by telling himself that Ethel should never know it.

CHAPTER V.

THE wind was rising, the shades of evening were falling fast, and it was growing colder each minute—colder in the atmosphere, and colder in Stella's heart.

"Mr. Lyon"—she had risen up from the seat by him, and was standing before him, her hands wrung tightly together—"can we do anything?—can we help ourselves in any way?"

He shook his head, and looked down at the waves that were dashing their white curly heads passionately amongst the rugged rocks.

"We can do nothing now; I could hardly see to steer my way, even if I could live through that wild surf. You know I would give my life for you, Mrs. Carhayes. Heaven knows I would give my life for you."

"And I would not accept the sacrifice, even were it available," she said, sitting down in an attitude that expressed, to him who knew every expression of hers so well, such bitter resignation.

"But I would make it," he said, in a tone of concentrated intensity that caused her heart for an instant to lie less heavily in her breast—"I would make it in a moment, if it could serve you; but it will not. You will need me by-and-by, Mrs. Carhayes; you will need me to tell Arthur what you will never tell him yourself—the story of your agony during these hours."

The corners of her mouth went down in such sorrowful rigidity, and she shook her head in such a weariful manner, that he was emboldened to say—

"Do you suppose that I have not fathomed that you think your husband distrusts you? I feel sure that you are mistaken."

"Mr. Lyon, I cannot discuss a question that so purely concerns Arthur and myself with anybody—not even with you. Whatever comes of this—whatever of misery or misunderstanding—you shall not strive to set me straight with my husband; I would rather bear anything than that you should say one word in my defence to my husband—in my defence did I say? I mean in explanation of this."

"Why?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Don't ask me," she said, her voice ringing clear and high through the rising storm. She could not tell him that if he advocated her cause with Arthur, and Arthur in some perverted way looked coldly upon his

advocacy, it would be the one straw too much for her to carry. "Don't ask me: only vow one thing to me—vow that you will never volunteer anything to Arthur which might seem to imply that you supposed Arthur had any right to an explanation from you. It would be death and dishonour to me if you took that line."

"I will not take it, Mrs. Carhayes."

Her teeth were chattering, her whole frame trembling. He was getting very much frightened about her. In the dim light even he could see how her face alternately reddened and paled. With all his heart he wished that he had never known her, never loved her, never met her again after she became Arthur's wife. With all his power of wishing, he wished that he had not come down to Treverner's house. For the first time in his acquaintance with her, he felt annoyed with Stella.

"She should control herself, and not get high-flown," he thought impatiently. "I am awfully sorry for her; but this is making a mountain out of a molehill."

Suddenly a change came over her.

"Mr. Lyon"—she was quite meek now—"I am very cold."

"You shall have my coat," he said, stripping it off in an instant.

She took it after a small protest, but he saw that she shivered now and again, and he girded in his soul against his utter inability to help her.

"My head aches and throbs," she went on, piteously; "and we must stay here all night. I dare not be ill—I dare not." Her head fell back, and she leant in a half-fainting state against the rock.

Had it been any other woman in the world, he would have put his strong arm round her and lifted her away from the wet, slimy rock where she was lying chilled to her soul—chilled to the marrow of her bones. But not to save her from the direst bodily discomfort, short of danger, would he have touched Mrs. Carhayes. He knew that in her present desolate mood any kindness from him—any kindness that savoured of tenderness, that is—might lead her to say words that she would bitterly repent of by-and-by.

Meanwhile the men whom old Mrs. Carhayes had sent out fraught with distracted injunctions had failed to find the lady. They had clambered up heights and peeped into caves, and shouted aloud through the shadowy mists of a stormy Autumn evening, and all to no avail. Then they had met and consulted and adjourned to an isolated little public-house to drink beer and discuss a fresh plan of action. And finally,

after some hours had been thus pleasantly but inefficaciously employed, a light came into the mind of one, and he said "he was blowed if he didn't think the lady must be on Asparagus Island."

Now these events came to pass the day after Ethel Huntingdon had made her father promise that he would not borrow money of Mr. Carhayes.

In spite of her full knowledge of the elasticity of her father's conscience, Ethel did believe that if he were not compelled to undergo too lengthened an ordeal of temptation he would keep his word to her.

"Arthur Carhayes must go before papa feels pinched for money again," she thought, sadly enough; for Arthur Carhayes's companionship, in spite of everything, was the brightest light that had ever shone on her life.

She was awake the whole of that night; and every woman knows how long the hours of the night are when her heart is heavy with the weight of a love that can never be realised. The girl had passed many a hopeless vigil of late, but none so utterly hopeless, so blankly miserable, as this one; for, before this, she had always let the one solitary gleam play upon the darkness—the one solitary gleam of a hope of his society for some time to come; but this night she knew that, if she would be spared the bitterest pain

of all—the pain of being indebted for money to the man who had preferred another woman before her—she must shut out that one gleam of sunshine by letting Arthur Carhayes go.

He had fallen into their easy, semi-Bohemian household ways, as a son of the house might have done. Ethel, on first coming to Clyst Abbott, had made strenuous efforts after order and punctuality and early hours; but habit is a mighty monarch, to whom the widest customs will curtsy; and so, gradually, rules lapsed, and the old careless *régime* of other days was re-established.

The twelve o'clock breakfasts, at which "devils" were eaten, and champagne was drunk, had a good deal to do with the universal howl of condemnation that was raised in that region against Miss Huntingdon, although it would be difficult to determine in what way they were worse than the repasts of a similar order which were taken at half-past one in the Philistine houses of the neighbourhood, under the name of luncheon. However, Ethel was damaged a good deal by their breakfast-hour, as much almost as she was by her ponies and her prettiness and her clever management of these things.

There was no billiard-room at Clyst Abbott, but by curious eyes bright lights were seen at unseemly hours of the night in the drawing-room windows;

and rumour—which is another name for gabbling servants—said that Miss Huntingdon was up till the small hours often, singing and playing to her papa and Mr. Carhayes, and that she allowed smoking in her drawing-room. “Probably she smoked herself,” people soon suggested; and then it was not long before it was kindly added, “Positively she smoked herself.”

But this night Ethel came to the resolution that it behoved her, if her father’s affairs were ever to be amended, to make a change. Mr. Carhayes must go; the one bit of sunshine should be shut out from her life, and she would try to cut down the expenditure of the house—at any rate until she could make money and pay for the luxuries that her father deemed necessities.

“And when he is gone I will work so hard that I will not have a moment to think of him, until I make a name; then I will claim his interest on the grounds of being his ‘fellow-labourer’ in reality, and even his wife won’t deny it to me when she knows that it was knowing him brought me out.”

She was only one of many, this poor Ethel, whom love, even though it was love ill-placed, has ennobled and exalted, and turned to literature. “L. E. L.” has worded the truth for the noble army of martyrs

who are being daily recruited from the surplus population of women :

It was not my sweet lute, she said,
My gentle lute, that did the wrong ;
It was not song that taught me love,
But it was love that taught me song.

The pen is an admirable panacea. It leads to other interests, to a stronger stand-point, to a knowledge that there is another misery as keen as baffled love in the world—and that is baffled ambition : consequently that there is a joy as great as gratified love, and that is gratified ambition.

But just now, in the dark long hours of the night, she was conscious that, in spite of all her highly wrought aspirations after a career, she would suffer a good deal in making her sacrifice on the shrine of honour and sending Mr. Carhayes away. "But he shall go before papa breaks down and gives Arthur the right to despise us thoroughly, for having him here to spend money on our follies ; he would think that I was a party to it, that I was the decoy-duck." Her excitement and agitation at this idea spoke well for Arthur Carhayes, for it proved that he had never given occasion to think him other than the honourable gentleman he seemed.

Her face would have been paler than it was, poor girl, when she went down the next morning, if she

had known that Sir Roland had asked Carhayes to help him out of his temporary difficulties the night before—had asked it in a *débonnaire* way, as if Ethel were a party to it too.

"Ethel and I were just looking into things a little this morning," he said, "and we find I have overdrawn the banking account. A grown-up daughter is an expensive luxury in these days, especially if she has no talent for keeping house." And Sir Roland laughed pleasantly as he said it, and then wound up with a request for a cheque for a thousand pounds.

But Ethel knew nothing of this, and so it was with a face free from all flush of shame that she asked Mr. Carhayes after breakfast to take a stroll round the garden with her.

"Delighted! Then you are not going to write as usual?"

"Not till I have a little talk with you," she said; and he thought that there was an additional touch of gentleness about her this morning that gave her a new charm.

She did not speak until they were some way from the house, in a walk that was bordered by high laurel hedges, a sheltered walk that kept up the idea of Summer weather still in its greenery and warmth.

"You will never guess what I have brought you here to say," she began; and he thought—

"I hope to heaven the girl isn't going to thank me, or say anything about the money;" aloud he said, hurriedly—

"Let me try to guess. It is something about the new novel, I am sure. I know the different phases of feeling to be passed through in writing one; your young characters lose vitality, and are like logs of wood on your hands—your pet incident reads flat—the girl whom you intend to be wild and sweet as a briar rose seems tame—the discursive passage that you wrote with pleasure at night you read with disgust in the morning, and find unprofitable. I know all about it."

"You know nothing about it," Ethel said, "and I won't be flattered off my topic by your pretending to treat me as a professed writer; I am going to speak about you, not about myself at all. We have kept you away from Mrs. Carhayes for a long time; both papa and I have been very selfish."

"I have been a very willing guest, Ethel."

"That is your kind-heartedness; of course you have been willing while you thought you could do any good to either of us; but now I am fairly started, and I must run alone, you know, some time or other. And as for papa, he is incorrigible; he will carry out his plans, however apparent the folly of them. In short——"

“In short, you wish me to go, Ethel; you are tired of me.”

“Well, to be honest, I do wish you to go. I can’t tell you my reason, but I have one; it is not that I am tired of you—you know that well enough.”

For a moment he thought that Ethel was feigning anxiety to get him away in order to have the pleasure of hearing him combat that anxiety, and plead to be allowed to remain. It is so hard to believe that a woman who has coquetted once is not coquetting always. We constantly quote Pope to the effect that

Woman’s at best a contradiction still ;

but we are uncommonly apt to refuse to give a woman the benefit of the doubt if she veers round, without telling us the reason why, from bad to good.

“I shall go certainly, without delay. Will you do me the honour to miss me a little in the pursuit of your literary avocations?”

“I loathe those stereotyped phrases, that you wouldn’t condescend to use if you were not laughing at me,” she said, leaning back against the compact laurel hedge, and looking up at him with eyes that pleaded sore for him not to press her on that point of why she wanted him to go. “I want to be able to absorb myself in my work, and while you are here—

I will be honest—I can't do it. When I have nothing more pleasant to look forward to, I shall revel in the pleasantest that is left to me—the writing that makes me forget that my life hasn't been and isn't all I could wish."

"And you have come to the conclusion that my presence here will have a cumbering effect on your efforts?"

"I have come to nothing of the kind. Communion with you set me thinking in the first place; but now, while you are in my atmosphere, I have no moral freedom; I think too much of what you will say and think about what I am writing. I am in handcuffs. Come, tell me—have I not given you reasons enough?"

"Not one of them being the real one," he said, quietly; and then Ethel resolved to rely entirely on his generosity—a plan that may safely be adopted with a few men, and said—

"Not one of them is my real reason—you are right; my real reason is one that would pain me to speak to you, Mr. Carhayes—not on my own account altogether," she added, hesitatingly, "selfish as I am."

"I shall leave Clyst Abbott to-day, Ethel, thinking more highly of you than ever," he said, frankly; and Ethel, through whose mind ran the thought—

"Papa will have neither time nor temptation to lower himself now," answered delightedly—

"And until you go stay and talk with me; let papa go over the land alone this once; you will do me more good than you will him. I wonder if you will ever come here again."

"Unquestionably I will."

"And I wonder if your wife will come with you—ever."

She saw the bright face darken a little, and received no answer to the last wondering suggestion. But, with the pertinacity of a woman who was interested in him, she repeated it.

"I wonder if your wife will ever come with you, Mr. Carhayes; I hope she will. What a study for me she would be! Such a queen of love and beauty! What is the secret of her sway over all men?"

"I didn't know that she had sway over all men." He tried to recover himself and speak lightly.

"I only say what rumour says, and looking at her I find it impossible to doubt rumour. You will tell her what my hopes are—won't you?—when you go home; and tell her how you have helped me to believe in myself—the best help that, I think. I should like her to understand that I am not the mere idle butterfly she thought me once."

"What makes you imagine she thought you any—

thing of the kind? My wife is a remarkably broad-minded and just woman."

"She may have been right," Ethel said, quickly. "At the time I speak of I should have been a mere idle butterfly if I hadn't just developed the waspish quality of a desire to sting. I shall some day be able to analyse in a novel the causes of the change that has come over me, and then some things that must be rather obscure to you now will be made clear."

He looked at her keenly for a moment, till more colour flooded the blooming face, and more light came into the lovely eyes.

"I can stand your gaze, however powerful the mental lens may be that you are applying to me, Mr. Carhayes," she said, with a low laugh; "my strength is as the strength of ten, just at present." Then they went back to the house, where he looked at a time-table, and made his arrangements for leaving Clyst Abbey immediately after luncheon.

Ethel Huntingdon was in the first stage of repentance for those efforts at creating an interest in Mr. Carhayes's heart for herself which she had made so strenuously. Now that they were out of the whirl of the society life in which there is no time to stop short and contemplate the consequences of any sin less in degree than murder—now, above all, that the habit of writing had given her the habit of thinking, which

had never been developed in her before—she did feel a sense of shame for having indulged so freely in that pastime of pleasing in the case of Arthur Carhayes, the married man.

“There is no harm done,” she told herself a dozen times a day; “he doesn’t care for me save as a friend. Mrs. Carhayes has not the least idea how hard I have tried to make her husband think me superior to her; and people who would babble about it know nothing of the matter. There is no harm done; but I have been a fool.”

A greater fool even than she was conscious of having been; for as yet she was blind to the consequences of her folly. They would be borne in upon her by-and-by in the bitterness of an outraged wife, and the averted looks of a *coterie* who were powerful because they were present in her life; in the anger of her father, and the pity of the man for whose sake she had thus run the gauntlet.

“No harm done!” This last and wildest of the Huntingdons must have been, after all, the purest-hearted of her race not to have known more than she did about the appearance of evil. She was resolved now to write out, to live down the foolish liking that had led her into a labyrinth of pleasing acts and “gay fooling,” the memory of which made her cheeks tingle. She was ready to do this, and she did not

know yet how very unavailing the readiness would be.

She had gone on so long in gaiety of heart and carelessness, and a little out of a kittenish maliciousness, that was in truth as void of evil purpose as a kitten, that it was a shock to herself almost when she discovered that hers was not at all the course of conduct she would hold up to admiration in print. To take when she had the power, and to keep whatever she could of man's love and attention, had always seemed a right and proper proceeding. But suddenly it dawned upon her that there was something contemptible in this grasping at that of which some one must of necessity be defrauded if it was rendered to her. Even reckless flirts reform sometimes; and the reformation is the more complete if it commences from within, than when it is the result of pressure from without.

She was delighted to-day at the composure with which Sir Roland received the tidings of Mr. Carhayes's immediate departure. "Sorry you are going, but you must find it dull here," he said, quite cheerfully; and Ethel, knowing nothing of the cheque that was reposing in her father's desk, thought that he had given up his design of bleeding the guest whom she had persuaded him to get there. There would be no chance of his doing so now, for Ethel had promised to

drive Mr. Carhayes to the station. She was desirous that there should be no change noticeable in her outer manner to him—only she knew full well that there were changes which, while they were imperceptible to others, would be patent to him. The subtle inflection of the voice was one of the sins she surrendered to her new-born aim at worthiness. The light, lingering pressure of the hand was another. “I will be as frank with him as a boy could be,” she thought; forgetting that this very frankness—or rather being ignorant that this very frankness—is a snare as efficacious to the full as the subtly sweet voice and the light reliant pressure.

However, she meant well; and so in good faith they started for the last drive they were ever destined to take together.

As they drove out of the Clyst Abbott grounds, a groom on horseback rode up with a note for Miss Huntingdon.

“An invitation to a country ‘At home;’ what sort of thing is it likely to be?” she said, when she had finished reading it. “Shall I go?”

He took the card, and found it was from the wife of a man holding a good position both in the Church and the world—the cadet of a county family, a rich rector in the neighbourhood, who had married a woman of title, the daughter of a hundred earls.

"Go, by all means. You will bore yourself, of course; but don't seem to do it."

"We have been here a long time, and she only found her way to call on me three days ago," Ethel said, flushing up.

"Nonsense; go. Take it for granted, if you like, that they have been away from the neighbourhood. You must visit; you cannot live here and see nothing of your kind."

"My kind shall seek me. I won't seek them—unless they are very different from what I imagine county people to be. Oh dear, how much more amusing life would be if people were cleverer and not so stuck-up—if everybody was more like you, for example!" she said, with an unpremeditated relapse into her old fashion of fawning upon and flattering him.

Ah me! the women free from faults
Have beds beneath the willow.

Ethel was no monster of perfection, free from faults, whatever other imperfections might be alleged against her. The old, generally accepted—however falsely accepted—Eve-like characteristic of "tempting the man" was cropping up, and she was conscious almost immediately that it was making itself manifest, and was sorry for the same; and proper words not coming at command, she said, quickly—

"After all, you are not nicer than any one else, only I happen to think you so. I don't mean that exactly. Believe that I mean just what I should about a brother whom I was very fond of, if he were ever so much cleverer than myself. I should say a little in love and a great deal in awe, you know. And now good-bye."

"Now good-bye." This was the end of it all. On a little crowded platform, with a number of inconsequent porters rushing about, and bells ringing, and engines gasping out their vapoury reminders, and vacuous people looking on, she had to say "good-bye" to the man who had made the light of her life for the last month—to say "good-bye" to him with the full knowledge upon her that should they ever meet again their relations towards each other would be altered materially. "Farewell the old romance!" It was pitiful to have to say "farewell" to it, though it was good at the same time to do so.

This is how they said it. This is how those two, who were more to each other than either knew, said "good-bye" to so much that had made one little pass in the mountainous weariness of the world more endurable to both of them.

She had sauntered on to the platform with him, in pursuance of that plan of hers of not making any visible sign of the change that had been wrought

in her sentiments concerning him, and standing there, a sudden shivering sense of the "dulness of it all" when he should leave came over her.

The lazy West-country train came leisurely puffing up. There was the usual amount of door-slamming, the usual display of superfluous energy on the part of people who had nothing to do, and of the *dolce far niente* on the part of those who were paid to do something. And during it all Arthur Carhayes and Ethel stood silently side by side—he, beautiful as a statue by a Greek artist of a god of the North; she, small, dark, and luminous, and wondrously witching; he, the idol of her life, so far as her life had gone, so far as the impressionable creature's experiences had reached; she, his pretty, clover little friend, the girl with a good deal in her, if it were only well directed. They stood there, this pair, side by side, and yet so far apart; and they were judged by that which was on the surface, not by that which was beneath it.

A stout, tall woman, whose draperies swirled and rustled about her as she walked, passed them on her way from the train, which had just stopped, to the entrance of the platform—a lady who had about her a wonderful appearance of reigning, and seeming to know it.

"Do you know her?" Mr. Carhayes asked Ethel; and when she said "No," he added, "She looked at

you so inquiringly." Then it was time for him to get into his carriage, and he took Ethel's hand without a word, and raised his hat, and was gone.

Miss Huntingdon turned round abruptly, saw herself still, without giving a thought to it, the object of attention to the lady with the swirling draperies, who was using an eyeglass in the insulting way in which a woman who is *not* short-sighted does use it, and got herself and her ponies away as rapidly as possible. The whole of the remainder of that day she wrote without ceasing; and when she put her head on the pillow at night she was happier than Arthur Carhayes, who had returned to a home clouded by the knowledge that his wife was missing.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY AGNES LYGARD was at home, on a grand lawn gorgeously begirt with flower-beds, and well shaded by magnificent groups of trees that were not in the sear and yellow yet, though it was late Autumn. Her husband was the rector of a parish adjoining Clyst Abbott, but her house was not the rectory. A curate lived in that building, which was dilapidated and dull, but which at the same time was in the heart of the parish, and accessible to all such as desired to see their pastor. Lady Agnes's house was called "Highlands," and was well removed from the village, and quite out of reach of the villagers.

"Gloomy, but grand," was Ethel's commentary on the affair, as with her father she drove up to the hall door, and caught a glimpse through a vista of hall and conservatory of a concourse of people standing about with croquet mallets in their hands and despondency depicted on their faces. She had come with no very brilliant anticipations of pleasure from

this, her first experience of country society ; but, in pursuance of some newly-formed resolutions, she had come determined to try to like it, and to seem to like it, to make herself as agreeable as she could, and to be grateful for any kindness shown her.

“You have no women friends—make some,” had been the parting injunction of Mr. Carhayes ; and the girl who was, after all, only in a transition state, longed to prove to him that she had soft feminine tendencies, and could take an interest in less piquant things than the excitement of men’s flatteries, novel-writing, and the subduing of restive horses. These things would always be dear to her, of course, until her ardent, impressionable nature was utterly “chastened and corrected” out of all semblance to the one which had been hers originally. But she was desirous at this time of quietly falling into position with other women of her age and class. She wanted to cease to be exceptional ; she yearned for quiet, wholesome companionship with her own sex ; she prayed passionately, as was her wont, that she might be given strength and opportunity to redeem the name of her race from that charge of recklessness which was so advisedly brought against it ; and so she had come to this great gathering at Lady Agnes Lygard’s in the best frame of mind for receiving favourable impressions.

The mistress of the mansion was seated on a chair of state on the mosaic pavement just outside the conservatory, the centre of a group of guests, who turned a blank sea of strange faces towards Ethel as she came out—a sea of cold, rigid faces that chilled her at once, and threw her into the worst state a woman can be in for making a favourable impression on her own sex, that, namely, of indignant consciousness that her own sex did not think well of her to start with.

“How do you do, Miss Huntingdon?” The words, spoken in the passively aggressive tone of utter non-interest in the one spoken to, caused Ethel to look up inquiringly, and in her hostess, Lady Agnes Lygard, she recognised the lady who had been on the platform while she (Ethel) had been bidding adieu to Mr. Carhayes.

“She is sorry she invited me—she wishes I were not here,” were not thoughts that conduced to make the manner of the *débutante* into Devon society at all prepossessing. Her face was covered with a blush that was the result of mingled anger and regret—anger, that she should be harshly and unjustly judged on account of an appearance merely of folly; regret, that she should ever have been weak enough to let there be about her even such an appearance.

“Will you go in and hear some music, or will you play croquet? I dare say I can get up another game

for you, if you will," Lady Agnes said, languidly putting her glass up, and looking leisurely around, while Ethel, stultified by her reception, began to be conscious of that awful emotional ball which will threaten to choke us when most we need all our verbal power and self-possession. Sir Roland, after exchanging a sentence with his hostess, had walked off with two or three gentlemen who had been gazing wearily at their daughters' manipulation of the croquet mallets for the last half hour, and who greeted him as a new element that might serve to keep their senses from slumbering for the next ten minutes. Young men were rare at these garden parties; they were regarded as oases in the desert, and were scrupulously awarded to the Rector's own daughters and their own familiar friends.

"Thank you, I would rather not play croquet, but I will stay out in the fresh air," Ethel said, as she placed herself on an isolated chair, where she passed a period of unutterable dulness and indescribable mortification. She had arrayed herself prettily, and she knew that she was looking charmingly bright and graceful. It was hard to have this feeling of neglect thrust upon her, for it was useless her trying to feel that Lady Agnes was overlooking her by accident, not design.

"Who is that pretty girl in buff?" the eldest Miss

Lygard's partner asked, as the exigencies of the game brought him close to that young lady; and she promptly assured him that she "didn't see a pretty girl in buff."

"Well, to define her more clearly, the one who has been seated alone, just outside the door, all the afternoon."

"That?—oh! that is Miss Huntingdon."

"Don't you know her?"

"No," giving her ball a sharp tap that ought to have warned him not to pursue the subject, but that only warned him not to propose to the young lady as she wished him to do.

"Why don't you, Miss Lygard? She really looks as if she could say something."

"I don't think mamma cares to introduce me to her; you can ask mamma to introduce you, presently, if you are anxious to know her."

"I am anxious to know her," he said, disregarding the reproachful glance that was bent on him; and then he became a rover as soon as possible, and made his way to Lady Agnes.

"As she is here, of course I'll introduce you, if you wish it," she said dryly.

"You didn't invite her then?"

"Oh yes, I invited her, but when I did it I was not at all aware of the extraordinary way in which she

goes on—flirting about in public with a married man, whose wife is miserable about it.”

The man, who was young and kind, and good-natured and good-looking, pulled his moustache, thoughtfully, for a moment or two, and then gave vent to the extenuating idea—

“Dare say she only did it because there was no other fellow, you know”—a lax view of the case that increased Lady Agnes’s rigidity tenfold, and made her cause Ethel to feel herself a more miserable sinner than she had felt before.

She shook her head and steadily refused when, the introduction effected, he tried to persuade her to play croquet. Intuition told her that these women who were around her would stand aloof from her and hurt her more than she was hurt already.

“I prefer sitting still and talking.”

“But you haven’t been talking all this time, Miss Huntingdon; I have been watching you.”

“Then you have seen the reason of my silence; no one came to talk with me.”

“You are a stranger in the neighbourhood?” he interrogated.

“Yes, and likely to remain so if this is a specimen of the way the neighbourhood treats one,” she said, a little bitterly. “I am at a loss to know why Lady Agnes Lygard asked me here; I could have

sat at home and enjoyed my own society equally well."

"One never knows what women mean," he said, giving vent to his sentiments concerning the only problem he had ever attempted to solve, with an air of helpless resignation that would have been funny to her in her normal mood, but that was simply irritating to her now.

"I know at any rate what this woman means," she said sharply; "she means me to feel that she does not want me here, and I shall not need a second lesson—she has taught me the first with such coarse strength."

She knew that she was indiscreet in making these remarks to a stranger, and that stranger a young man; but a "woman scorned" is not apt to be prudent, and this stranger's eyes were full of pity and admiration. Her heart swelled at the thought of the sympathy she would have had from Arthur Carhayes had he been here. "I believe he would have called them to account for it," she said to herself, and the reflection soothed and comforted her, and made her more amenable to Mr. Grey's next suggestion.

"You must be tired of this one spot; will you walk about the garden a little? Come and look at some marvellous asters that are going to a flower show in a few days; will you?"

She rose up, and together they walked across the lawn full in sight of all Lady Agnes's guests, who of course on this occasion were all of one mind with Lady Agnes.

"Dear Lady Agnes must be intensely annoyed to see the set that girl is making at Mr. Grey, after the attention he always pays to her daughter."

"Her daughter to him, I thought it was," a man answered, carelessly. "Pretty girl that Miss Huntingdon is, to be sure."

"Is that Miss Huntingdon?" The querist was an eager-eyed woman, hugely curious on every scandalous topic that she heard of; the same lady, in fact, who dined at the great art patron's table on the night of the unlucky renewal of acquaintance between Stella and Rupert Lyon.

"Is that Miss Huntingdon? Dear me! I hardly knew her without Mr. Carhayes. You see, when one is accustomed to see a young lady always with the same escort, you hardly recognise her if she happens to be without him. I met his wife the other night—a sweet creature," and the lady sighed, and omitted to mention how Stella had snubbed her.

"Mr. Carhayes has gone home—at last."

"Quite time too, I should say. Mrs. Carhayes must have been very dull in that great house. A most lovely woman she is. I met an artist the other

night—at the dinner I met her at also—and he told me he thought her the greatest beauty the world held—Mr. Rupert Lyon, you may know him.”

“Rupert Lyon? The great beauty Miss Orme was awfully in love with him last year.”

“Why, Mrs. Carhayes was Miss Orme! Dear me, how very odd that you should have mentioned it without knowing! Well, I must say there was too great a display of intimacy between them that evening, if there is any foundation for the report you mention.”

And so on, and so on; the ball was thrown backwards and forwards, giving many a hard blow in its course.

Meanwhile, Ethel and Mr. Grey were sauntering along the extreme border of the lawn, keeping well out of earshot of all those who had shown so little inclination to fraternise with the girl who had come fraught with the determination to form such acquaintance with some of them as should aid her in keeping thoughts of Mr. Carhayes aloof. The better feeling—the feeling that there was imprudence if not danger, and impropriety if not guilt, in the course she had pursued with regard to him—had taken strong root in her conscience. But now she was ready to uproot it, and cast it behind her, and defy these people who seemed to be condemning her without sufficient cause.

"I have a sister here somewhere," her companion said presently, looking round upon the various scattered groups. "She is a nice little thing by nature, but a little inclined to be starchy. She is the wife of Arden, the vicar of a place near here. Will you let me introduce you to her?"

Ethel hesitated for a few seconds. Inclination prompted her to refuse resolutely at once; it would seem like catching at a straw. Then came the reflection that this man at least meant kindly. "Men always mean so much more kindly than women," she thought; and, additionally, she called to mind her own power of pleasing and charming. She only wanted a fair field and no favour shown to her. If once she could know any of these people, and felt it to be a game worth the candle, she would force them to like her, and compel them to think well of her. Here, at least, was an opening. Ah! she little knew how inauspicious a one it was.

"Thank you,—I shall be very glad to know your sister." She said it in a way that implied she would be glad to know his sister because she *was* his sister. Proficients in the art of pleasing men do not give up the practice of their art lightly.

"There she is—let us go over to her." He pointed out a lady occupying the chair at the conservatory door, on which Ethel had posed so long—a fresh, fair,

rosy-faced lady, in a green dress, with green feathers in her hat.

"She looks like a grass plat," Ethel thought, "and probably she is tedious. I haven't had much experience of country parsons' wives, but my idea of them is that they are not exciting companions. However, she is a much better woman than I am probably, and I should like to make her think me not altogether a bad girl."

The poor motherless child was looking soft and sweet now under the influence of the penitential mood. Her combativeness had been aroused at first by the manner of her reception; and it must be borne in mind that the element of combativeness is strong in the majority of artistic natures. The more powerful the dramatic qualities are, the more keenly the possessor of them is alive to slights, and on the alert to resent them.

"Gracie, let me introduce you to Miss Huntingdon; my sister, Mrs. Arden. Here, I'll put this chair for you, Miss Huntingdon."

He made a little amiable fuss that covered the chill of his sister's manner. She inclined her head, half rose from her chair, and ceded her hand to Ethel's hearty grasp in a limp way that acted like a small shock from an electric battery on Ethel's highly strung nerves. But with all this she did not positively evade

Miss Huntingdon, nor did she seem to resent the introduction as an unwarrantable brotherly liberty.

"Have you been long in the county—Clyst Abbott, I believe?"

"Yes, Clyst Abbott," Ethel assented.

"A lovely country, is it not?"

"Lovely: I know every inch of it within a radius of thirty miles, I should think."

"Dear me, you must be a great walker."

"No, I ride."

"I used to ride before I married," Mrs. Arden said, complacently; "I had brothers to go with me. Now, of course, Mr. Arden has but little time, and it is dull riding with a groom only; so I have given it up."

"I ride alone, or at least"—Ethel would be honest—"lately Mr. Carhayes has been staying with us, and he has ridden with me; but generally I ride alone."

"Oh!"

Intuitively Ethel felt that she had adventured upon dangerous ground in that chance allusion to Mr. Carhayes. The conversation came to an end. The topic of the scenery proved a *cul-de-sac*, but Miss Huntingdon made an effort in another direction.

"Can you tell me where I shall find the best library in the neighbourhood? We haven't found a good one to subscribe to yet, and one can't live long without books."

"I haven't much time for reading myself, and of course my husband has a large library ; but my brother devours all the rubbish that it is written, and he can tell you."

"Smith has a depôt at Torquay, where you can get everything the day after it is published, Miss Huntingdon."

"Delightful ! I shall subscribe at once, and proceed to distract the manager by constantly changing my books."

"There is a great deal of time wasted in reading," Mrs. Arden said, sententiously ; "people who read—read perpetually—must neglect their household duties."

"I don't agree with you," Ethel answered, warmly—"I don't agree with you at all ; a woman must be very slow, and very awkward and stupid, in the performance of her household duties if she manages to make them stretch out over the whole day, I should think."

"You are not married ; you have no children to take up your time," Mrs. Arden said, with a sort of plaintive pride that was meant to be very touching.

Mr. Grey laughed. "Come, I like that, Gracie," he said ; "you leave your cubs to your nurses entirely."

"Then I have a good deal to do in the parish,

Hugo," she interrupted, eagerly. "You know I arrange all the music and——"

"I know you fuss about a good deal, and bother your husband's curates," he said, laughingly; "but perhaps you will concede that, as Miss Huntingdon is not a clergywoman, she is justified in 'devouring books,' as you call it."

Ethel's spirits were rising fast.

"I hope you will think me justified in something else too," she put in. "I have such a love of a certain kind of literature that I am trying to add to it; I am writing as well as reading, Mrs. Arden,—writing a regular three-volume novel."

"A novel!"

Ethel nodded and smiled, and blushed at her own folly in being elated at the mere idea of what she was doing.

"What a pity!" Mrs. Arden said, heaving a deep sigh. "Now if it were anything improving, one would not care so much; but a novel!"

"But a novel may be improving. I don't for one moment say that mine will be, because I don't think it will; but I hope it will be amusing—that is an essential qualification for a novel to possess."

Mrs. Arden drew herself up, and armed herself with all the weapons she knew of. Propriety was the one she flourished first.

"I am shocked at the notion of young girls reading novels, much more at their writing them. Of course I see the things that are in the magazines."

"Then you see some that are very good; you see what often does the majority more moral good than a sermon, because it is done undesignedly; for I don't believe any real artist sits down and consciously fits his 'work to some useful end.'"

"I wonder your father allows you to do it, Miss Huntingdon. You won't publish it under your own name?"

"I wouldn't publish it under any other name than my own," Ethel answered, rather hotly.

"But people lose caste so, especially women. Now I assure you, if they are in society, there is still always a feeling, you know, about a person who writes."

"I should think there was a feeling." Ethel's good temper was restored by her sense of the exquisite humour of it all.

"I mean a sort of feeling that people who write for money are not quite the sort of people one likes to know, however amusing they may be. It may do in London; but I assure you here you will find that a very strong and decided feeling will be raised. There is only one thing worse, I think, and that is a lady becoming an actress. Of course every one must cut her, you know; and so then she is thrown in contact

with people who are quite contaminating, I am told."

"I think I should like to be cut by people who could 'look down' on a professor of a single art. I never before heard any one speak as you have been speaking, Mrs. Arden; it seems too funny to me."

"Ah, you haven't lived among county-people before," Mrs. Arden said, insufferably. She was the daughter of a man who had made a fortune by the manufacture of a peculiar kind of candle; and she had married a man who went straight from Oxford at twenty-two into the mentally invigorating air of a West-country parish, buried in a remote and hilly district. Naturally she imagined herself fully competent to offer an opinion on a social question that had never come under her consideration before.

Sir Roland came up to them now, asking Ethel if she was ready to go, and Ethel introduced her father to her new acquaintances. Mrs. Arden disapproved of the daughter, but she could not resist a baronet. At once suavity reigned, and graciously and smilingly she reverted to the subject that they had just been discussing.

"I have been telling Miss Huntingdon that we shall all think it very shocking if she takes to novel-writing."

He laughed.

"And surprised her, I suppose. Ethel doesn't know what a primitive set of people she has come amongst."

Ethel blessed her father for that speech—one calculated (undesignedly enough, for Sir Roland regarded the set by which he was surrounded as something too funnily unsophisticated for him to consider it at all) to press heavily on the pride of a woman of Mrs. Arden's calibre. In common with the majority of her class, she held the belief—half unconsciously—that her order in the country was the omnipotent one by which society was regulated. To hear her and those of her own ilk spoken of as "primitive," and so unqualified to give an opinion about a worldly matter, was just one of those ultra-galling things that ought not to offend respectable mediocrity, but that invariably does offend it, and hurts it the more because consistency forbids its protesting against an attribute which is pure in itself.

"I hope you will have nothing to do with that girl, Hugo," the lady said severely, as she caught her already infatuated brother gazing fondly after the retreating forms of Sir Roland and Miss Huntingdon; "every one will follow Lady Agnes's line, and she evidently thinks Miss Huntingdon bad style. A girl who rides about alone, and writes novels——"

"And looks like a Venus, must be delightful," her brother interrupted. "Come, you dear, little, bitter Christian; the charm of the party has vanished, and I am going."

CHAPTER VII.

IN following Ethel's experiences, and seeing how the first young flowers of new resolves were blighted in her case, we have gone some way ahead in point of time of the events now to be recorded as having happened at Carhayes Place.

When Arthur Carhayes left Clyst Abbott, many days before Lady Agnes Lygard was "At home" so unpleasantly to poor Ethel, there were no very high hopes of approaching domestic happiness in his heart. He was galled by the fact that he had been a false prophet in his own case—galled by that inability to win his wife's heart which she had so frankly foreshadowed to him before their marriage, and in the truth of which he had then so stoutly refused to believe—galled by her silence on the subject of having seen Rupert Lyon—galled by the feeling that other people were beginning to be aware of her indifference—but, above all, galled by the knowledge that he had, that he was unjust in his expectations and his judgment.

He reached his home about eleven at night—reached it in the midst of a whirling storm of wind and rain, that caused him to have a sick, disheartened feeling, and made him uncertain whether the chill was more in his heart or his body. It must be remembered that this was the same night which poor Stella was spending on the island rock.

He was met by his mother, who had only just returned from her superintendence of the various unsuccessful quests that were going on for his wife—met her in the hall, for she had heard the wheels of the fly, and had rushed out, fondly hoping that she was going to receive the wanderer back in safety.

She lifted up her hands with a passionate gesture of deprecation and pity and terror, and as he caught her in his arms and kissed her, she managed to say—

“Arthur, my darling boy, come into my room quietly and——”

“Where is Stella?”

“Not here.—I mean not at home, but be calm——”

“Mother, is my wife dead? Don’t try to break it—say it in a word.”

“No.”

He gave a groan of relief, and leant back, weak and

faint as a frightened woman, against the wall; and she, the mother who loved him so well, was wise and not garrulous.

"We went to the coast, and while I slept after luncheon Stella must have wandered somewhere and missed her way. My boy—Arthur—don't look like that."

"Lost!"

"No, no, no—a thousand times no!" she cried, wringing her hands as she denounced the possibility of the evil he worded, although it had been present to her mind from the moment of her missing Stella. "There are so many turns and windings about there, dearest, she must have taken one of these and been unable to find her way out again; but the sailors will search and shout through the night. And you know how brave our darling is, Arthur; she will keep up for your sake."

"She will do nothing for my sake; but, Heaven bless her, I'll find her myself if she's—alive——" A sob choked his voice and he could not finish his sentence for a few moments; and during those few moments who can tell what agonies of remorse possessed him? He had been off guard, absent from his post, false to the charge he had undertaken. His mind had been full of foolish prejudices and pique, and under the influence of these wretched

feelings he had done his wife the mighty wrong of doubting her integrity and suspecting her of petty concealments. And now that he was burning to tell her that the cloud had passed from his mind and should never darken it again, the horrible fear came upon him that his wife was lost to him for ever, and with a shudder he asked himself, "Would she have been so lost had she been happy?"

This dark idea he felt would drive him mad if he remained passive any longer.

"Mother, I must have my horse and start at once. It may be that when we meet again there will be a weight of guilt on my head."

"Arthur!"

"If she has died by her own hand, it is because she could not live as my wife. Sweet mother, pray for me!" And then he went away weeping such bitter tears as can only be shed by the man who fears that he has wrecked the one who is dearer to him than life.

And the mother who had helped on this thing too, who had urged and influenced and talked Stella into the sacrifice of marrying a man she liked, while her heart was mad about a man she loved, went back to the quiet chamber where her son had been born, and prayed and cried as women do pray and cry when the

truth is brought home to them that none but God can help them now.

The idea of Stella, bright, beautiful, loved Stella, having been so tired of life that she had sought her death by her own hand, had never been presented to Mrs. Carhayes's mind until Arthur had worded it. At first she had been too much stunned to combat it. It was to her as if a dove had been suddenly accused of hurting a bullock, or as if a strong man had seriously avowed that he had been nearly kicked to death by a butterfly. There was something so incongruous in it that her mind could not grasp the accusation at once. That Stella, sweet, good Stella, could, under any circumstances, commit a crime, was as appalling a proposition to Stella's loving old friend as if a baby had been accused of premeditated arson.

But after being alone for awhile, with the idea getting more familiar to her every moment, the cold horror of the truth that even the highest and the best have been tempted and have fallen, crept about her insensibly, and enveloped her judgment. Then came the remembrance, too, that Stella had seen Rupert Lyon the day before, and that a host of old recollections had been stirred probably, and the misery of it was too great for her to bear, and still there was nothing for her to do but bear it—nothing for her to

do but to bear it on her knees, humbly praying for her son.

Meanwhile Arthur had ridden hastily over to the village, from which every strong man had departed in the search for Stella.

Distracted as he was by forebodings and remorse, the habit of authority, and the characteristic of carrying all things before him to a successful issue, were eminently useful now. In a minute he had before him, on a large scale, a perfect map of the coast. In another minute his intelligence had told him that the detached rock was the spot on which all his hopes were centred, and in another quarter of an hour he was at the head of a band of men who were pulling a seaworthy boat vigorously round to Stella's prison.

* * * * *

"I hear the plash of oars. Listen! listen!"

Stella, forgetful now of cold and misery, sprang to her feet as she spoke, and then bent down and put her ear against the rocky ground; then started erect again, as a loud shout penetrated the air. An answering shout from Rupert and a wild cry of delight from Mrs. Carhayes sufficiently indicated their position, and in another minute Arthur Carhayes had sprung up the rock, and was holding his wife to his heart.

He did not see her companion. The earth for him then held only one form; but, as he sank down on

his knees before her, and she tenderly bent over him—for her heart was touched by the way in which he was sobbing out half-inarticulate thanks to God—she whispered—

“Mr. Lyon is here too, Arthur;” and Rupert at the same time held his hand out, saying—

“Archie, old man, this has been an awful time for your wife; you must get her home as fast as you can.” And Arthur rejected the proffered hand of the friend who had been dear to him as a brother.

The agony of it all—the agony of that awful revulsion of feeling when he found that the wife he had been mourning for as dead was alive and with his rival—the awful agony of that anger, who can depict?

“Why could he not die of the pain of the doubt?” he felt, as he lifted his wife in his arms, and carried her down to the boat in silence. They each and all felt that this was not the season for explanation.

“I came here by chance, and found Mr. Lyon sketching,” Stella essayed to say, but she was too much worn out physically to attempt any elucidation of what she knew must be a frightful mystery to her husband. How she wished then that she had told him of Rupert’s being at the Treverners’! Had she done so, the matter would not have worn this aspect of wholesale concealment and deceit. As it was, the only course left for her now was to make a clean

breast of it—to tell him everything that had happened exactly as it had happened—to “nothing extenuate,” and to trust that his mercy might temper his judgment.

“To tell him all that had happened,” that undoubtedly would be the wisest, truest course. But could she remember it all? What was this strange feeling of there being a mist before her eyes that was denser than the mists of night? What was this pain at the back of her head, that seemed to be drawing it down with a tangible grasp? She shuddered strongly, and wailed out, “Am I going mad?” and the husband who had sworn solemnly always to believe and trust her, thought that she was feigning.

After she was lifted into the carriage that was waiting for her, Rupert Lyon put his hand on Arthur’s shoulder, and tried to draw him aside.

“Archie, dear old boy, will you listen to me for a minute?”

Arthur shook the hand off, as if it stung him.

“What have you to say?” he growled out.

“This I swear, on my honour ——”

“Your honour!”

“My honour, sir!” He could not help dropping the conciliatory tone, and speaking haughtily now, for his forbearance had been too sharply tested. It seemed to him too awful a thing that a man who had

known her as Arthur did should distrust Stella for a moment. "My honour, sir!—and if that pledge seems insufficient to you, I will say that, by the God we both believe in, your wife is as pure in motive as an angel."

Arthur interrupted him with a groan that was partly sob and partly oath, and that was altogether an awful thing for a man to listen to who would have given his life to be believed.

"You shall hear me," Rupert cried, eagerly; and then rapidly and clearly he told of the meeting between Mrs. Carhayes and himself at the Treverners', and of the awkward proposition which Mr. Treverner had made about copying the Sir Joshua. "She came out to avoid our visit to-day, and I had evaded going because I can go to no man's house who has repented of his friendship for me. On my dying bed I could swear to every word of this with a clear conscience. Has my speech cast the demon, that was trying to change it, from your heart?—has it satisfied you?"

"It is the last I shall ever hear from you," Arthur said, and there was much that was piteous in the wrongheadedness that was keeping him in the fetters of the suspicious fiend which he would not exorcise. Then he turned to the carriage in which Stella, wet, cold, and completely prostrated by a multitude of emotions, was crouching, and got in by her side.

Mr. Lyon stood and watched them till the darkness of the night covered them, and then he went into the little inn and called for ink and paper, and wrote—

“DEAR MR. TREVERNER,—Business that must have my personal attention immediately compels me to go abroad for an indefinite period. I must, therefore, cancel the arrangement I so gladly made with you the other day. Will you kindly forward my portmanteau to my London address, and believe that nothing but the most urgent necessity would have made me forego a plan that was at the same time so pleasurable and profitable?—I am, my dear Mr. Treverner, yours very truly,

“RUPERT LYON.”

“I should be a hound if I stayed for it to be surmised that she was unlucky enough to have had me as her fellow-prisoner—poor unfortunate woman!” he thought, mournfully. “Those boatmen fellows didn’t know me, and nothing can be made of the affair to her detriment if Arthur developes a decent amount of common sense. A nuisance to give up old Treverner’s commission, though! However, I should be a hound to stay.”

The romance was over for him. His love for Stella Orme had been deep and intense, but he had crushed down his love for Stella Carhayes. He knew right

well that, had he been permitted, he could have trusted himself in her presence for ever without one guilty thought cropping up to disturb his conscience. It was hard, therefore, because others judged Stella and him with such obtuse illiberality, to have to forfeit what was so much to him as this commission would have been. The romance was over, and real life with all its bills pressed heavily upon him. However, once more he mistook the point of honour, and made a sacrifice that it was better he should not have made—made a sacrifice under the influence of that delusion which is so wide-spread, that if one is in doubt as to two courses, one is more likely to be right if the least pleasant of the two be pursued.

“There’s a queer letter I have had from Lyon,” Mr. Treverner remarked, handing it to Mr. Carhayes, the following day. The disappointed patron of Art had ridden over to inquire for Mrs. Carhayes after the little misadventure which rumour had already wafted abroad in various guises. Stella herself was in bed, in a high fever, raving, and—alas! the romance was not over for her yet—raving of Rupert Lyon.

Mr. Carhayes took the note and read it, and, far from fathoming the feeling which had actuated Rupert, he misunderstood and misjudged him more bitterly than before.

“The coward! he has gone before I can force the

truth from him," he thought, utterly forgetting that he had declared that he would never listen to another word from Rupert, and utterly ignoring the fact that Rupert's departure cleared all difficulties away from the explanatory path which it would be best for him (Arthur) to take.

If Mr. Lyon had gone back to Treverner House, he would have been subjected to that searching, subtle cross-questioning which idle people so excel in. And as he would have been reserved in his statements, and would cleverly have baffled all inquiries as to the reason why he had not appeared at luncheon and dinner the day before, evil conjectures would infallibly have arisen if they had ever been made public through another source. Now, as things rested, the case was in the hands of Mr. Carhayes completely. Unhappily for all parties, jealousy had so blinded his judgment that he did not know what to do with it.

"His business requires him very opportunely; he did not care to stay here and answer to me for his conduct in not making some effort to get my wife off that infernal rock," he said, bitterly. And then the inquiring mind of Mr. Treverner was set in action, and all the tale was told so far as Arthur knew it.

"And it strikes me," Mr. Treverner said, after narrating the little episode rather floridly at his own

table that night—"and it strikes me he isn't nettled solely about Lyon's not having made an effort to get the lady off the rock;" and he laughed significantly, as estimable and amiable people will when the heart-strings of their friends are being manipulated for their edification and amusement.

"He thinks, perhaps, that he made an effort to get her on the rock," another kindly person observed, suavely.

"Well, you know there was a story about Mrs. Carhayes and Mr. Lyon when she was Miss Orme—that he was madly in love with some one else, whom he married; but perhaps he is not quite so absorbed in his wife now."

"It is said that he got Mr. Carhayes to propose to Miss Orme, and to tell her that his friend's affections were irrevocably engaged elsewhere." And so on, and so on, *ad libitum*, until the biographical notices of the trio under discussion became such marvellous compilations that none of the subjects of them would have recognised these stories of their lives.

This is how we are all spoken about by, and all speak of, others. This is how the wretchedness, and shame, and falsehood, and disgrace that permeate society everywhere are concocted. This was the way in which Arthur Carhayes, by reason of his want of power over himself, was allowing his wife's name to

become a byeword and his own name a laughing-stock to the world.

Meanwhile poor Stella was incapable of making an effort to justify or defend herself. The cold, the agitation, the fright, and the deep underlying dread of being misjudged—these things had done their work, and brought about a climax that common sense might have prophesied. She was lying, helpless, suffering, and burning, in a darkened room, with her pulses going at mad fever speed, and her broken words every moment stabbing those who watched her.

The woman who loved her like a mother distrusted and doubted and wailed over her as one who had fallen now, and still tried to keep up, or rather to restore Arthur's faith—poor tortured Arthur, who sat by the bed watching with hot tearless eyes the restless form of the woman he loved to desperation, and believed such evil of as pure-minded Stella had never even conceived—sat there, and listened to the loving words which his mother addressed to him, hoping to comfort him—words which, in truth, either bored him horribly, or fell like meaningless sounds on his ears.

"My dear Arthur, just consider; if our poor darling had had the faintest notion of meeting that dreadful man who has been the bane of our lives, it seems to me, *could* she have told me that he was coming here even that very day?"

"I don't know, mother ; I can't consider anything. I am maddened by so many things—by the fear, above all, that my wife may not live." And then he fell on his knees by the side of the bed, and pressed his lips tenderly to the burning hand that was being flung wildly about.

What an appalling thing it was to love and doubt in this way ! What a ghastly Nemesis had overtaken him for the careless confidence with which he had always assumed that success must invariably be his portion !

Then a harder, a worse mood would come over him. His thoughts would travel to that one who had been his friend, and who had robbed him of what was dearer to him than his life ; and in his anguish he cursed Rupert Lyon, and felt so impotent that he almost cursed himself.

Was it vanity that had led him on to disregard Stella's aversion to the marriage ? Was it vanity or love that had made him believe himself to be so omnipotent that he could in time conquer her memories and win her to himself entirely ? Or had it been a case of obscured vision, a subtle glamour thrown over him to lure him to his ruin ?

This illness of hers complicated matters painfully. If insensibility had not stepped in as her ally, he must surely, by his words of warm remonstrance and

rebuke, have touched her to compunction for her treachery to him. But now that weapon of speech was wrested from him. How should he dare to revert to it when she recovered—if ever she recovered—her senses? How should he feel when first her eyes met his with reason in them again? What an agony of sorrow and shame would be his when the moment came for the woman who had deceived him to realise that he knew how fully she had done it! Would she attempt to defend herself, or would she resign herself to the state of passive endurance which he, out of regard to her mind, might be compelled to observe? It was all dark before him. He could do nothing, determine about doing nothing. The only thing left for him in life was to endure, and that patiently.

And while this under-current of feeling was his portion, he was perpetually being stabbed to the heart by her pathetic appeals to Rupert to “help her,” to “save her,” to “screen her from Arthur.” What wonder that he thought the Stella he had so adored a fallen star indeed?

The man for love of whom all this misery had been brought about meanwhile had gone back to his own home and prepared his wife for a change. Barbara by this time had altered from the Bab we knew at first. An interest had been introduced into her life

which had softened the hard nature, and given colour to her hitherto colourless career. There was a touch of poetry in the way in which she told herself, hourly almost, that when she was the mother of his child she would be more to her husband.

Rupert's return was unexpected and abrupt, but Barbara was just one of the women whom no man need fear to take unawares. She was one of those excellent managers whose houses are always in order, and who invariably have stores of everything; accordingly she was equal to any emergency. She had been very dull indeed during her husband's absence, and had looked forward to a lengthened period of this perfect dulness and solitude. Therefore the greeting she gave him when he came in unexpectedly had a tinge of warmth in it that touched him, and gave him a sense of having come into a safe harbour where he might anchor with safety.

This was a comforting sensation after having been tossed about so very much against his will on the troubled waters of misunderstanding. So her manner reacted on his, and he was kind and gentle, and anxious, apparently, to hear that she was well, and that she had been well during his absence. As was natural, being a man, he took the late episode much less to heart than did poor Stella—the chief feeling he had about the matter being that he was sorry and

annoyed that Arthur should have fallen so utterly from the high estate of his former judgment.

In fact, events were forcing these respective characters to take their natural turns. It was not given to the man whose life was passed in action to feed upon memory to the same extent to which it was given to the woman. Rupert had about him the power of making the best of things—a power that would not have developed so thoroughly if he had not come to the age when a comfortable well-ordered home and all things always “ready for him” are no trifles, but are, on the contrary, real tangible compensations to a man for the blighted loves and hopes of youth.

If Stella could have realised how small a share she, the former queen of his soul, had of that soul, she would, at one gulp, have swallowed the bitter dose and been cured. But, like most women, she clung to the delusion that the one he had married must for ever fail to satisfy him, because she was so inferior to the Stella Orme he had once loved.

He had been home several hours before he gave any explanation to his wife of the circumstances of his return. Then the thrifty spirit of Bab called it forth.

“You won’t be at home long, I suppose, Rupert; you will be anxious to get on with the work you

undertook for Mr. Treverner? We shall want a little nest-egg in the Spring, you know, when I shall not be able to keep my eye on things. I am sure there will be a great deal of extravagance and waste in the kitchen."

"I have no more work to do at Treverner's place; I am thinking of going abroad."

The old hard spirit of the patient woman who had waited for him for ten years came back again as she listened to this.

"No more work to do at Treverner's place!—have you made a better engagement then?"

"No, not yet. The fact is, Barbara, my honour obliged me to give it up; so say no more about it."

A light came into her mind and into her eyes.

"Treverner House is somewhere near Carhayes Place, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Thank you, Rupert," she said, heaving a sigh of relief. "I will not ask another question, but I will say thank you."

The explanation naturally ended there: for, as Bab was sufficiently gifted with self-command to ask no more questions, it was hardly to be expected that Rupert should volunteer a statement on the subject.

"I thought of going abroad—how would you like it?"

"Of giving up this house and selling the furniture?"

"Yes; we could live on less abroad."

"I shouldn't like it; but we will go, of course, if you think it best. But I am a dull woman, Rupert, and the language would be difficult to me, and foreign ways would perplex me."

"Would you like an English country place better?"

"Yes, if we must leave town."

"I wish to leave town for a few years," Rupert said, emphatically. The fact is, he had an invincible dislike to the idea of meeting Arthur Carhayes now that the latter had avowed the hatred and suspicion that filled his heart; and in London he might meet the Carhayeses any day, and be so treated that for the sake of his honour he would be compelled to tell the tale and deny the calumny. So he said—

"I wish to leave town for a few years; and, if we don't go abroad, the Black Country will be my best field. Shall we go down and live near Manchester?"

"I thought it was an ugly country, and that artists didn't like it."

"I don't sketch,—what does it matter what the country is? The Manchester men would buy my pictures: they are the most liberal patrons of Art we have, whether they know anything about it or not."

And so it was decided that they should go to Man-

chester and settle there ; and thus it seemed that they had taken a path that would lead them away from all possibility of ever crossing the road of life along which the Carhayeses were travelling. And Bab took this fact into consideration, and revelled in it.

But before they began their new life Stella had struggled back out of the oblivion that had been her portion for so long a time, and had looked once more with the light of reason in her eyes at that patient old watcher whose heart was tender towards the poor sufferer still, though the quality of the tenderness had changed.

"Where is Arthur?" were her first words. "I must speak to him at once."

"He will be with you in one minute, Stella, my poor child."

So the dreaded moment came !

CHAPTER VIII.

ARTHUR CARHAYES came into the darkened room where lay his wife, and his mother fluttered away from the bedside with a series of sobs stifling her utterance, and a general impression of its being well that the end of the world should come upon them before either one of those whom she loved so well, and whose words would be sure to break her heart, could speak.

"Stay here, mother," Arthur said, more sternly than he had ever spoken to her before; and she obeyed him from sheer force of habit, and out of a strong conviction that her love for them both would save them from being so harsh to one another, that no balm humanity knew of could ever heal the wounds that harshness might make.

She was but the shadow of the Stella he had known first, this wan, weak-looking woman, who tried to rear her head from the pillow as he approached, and faltered, and flagged, and fell away

again with a moan of weakness—but the shadow of the original Stella, but, oh how, how infinitely dear to him still!

The mother turning haltingly from the door because her love for her boy, and her love for that poor misguided one whom he had married, were so strong that she could not betake herself out of all participation in their pain, simply because it was worse than death for her to endure the sight of it; the husband who had been so loving coming up as a laggard; the wife who had been so confident now utterly cowed—here was a picture indeed not wanting in dramatic power or effect.

The feeble, hot hands went astray over the counterpane, the tired, restless head moved itself uneasily on the pillow, the whole form of the woman quivered with mental excitement that was harder to bear than any mere physical pain. She understood so well—weak as her brain was still—the downcast face, the averted eyes, the entire alteration that had taken place in the man who was slowly advancing from the door to the side of the bed.

“Arthur!” The name rippled out nervously, and there was a power of appeal in it. It thrilled his nerves to hear her speak to him thus, and to see the flutter of those wasted hands. But sentiment had overpowered reason far too long. His heart should

cease to play his judgment false in this degrading way.

She had lifted herself upon her elbow when she spoke; but now, when for answer he put his hand up to his face to recover himself before he trusted his trembling lips to utter the woeful words that would blight his own life whatever they might do to hers, she fell back flushed, panting.

"You have not a word for me after all the danger and agony I have been in."

"Heaven help me," he exclaimed, "your danger and agony have wrung my heart to breaking, and the words I have to say I would rather die than speak; still, as it seems I must live on, they must be said. Stella, you shall have your freedom; why did you not demand it before—before——"

"Before what?" The soft trembling was over now. The quivering of love and gratitude was exchanged for the rigid intensity of purpose of the woman wronged.

"Before you descended to subterfuge and trickery—before you gave the lie to the purest, truest face a woman was ever endowed with to the destruction of herself and others. You shall have your freedom."

She made no answer; but she never moved her eyes from his face, or so much as lowered an eyelid. Her composure was marvellous, and it shocked him.

It would have been more marvellous to him still, and shocked him infinitely less, had he known that underneath it a very tempest of feeling was shattering her reason nearly. He went on in a low voice—

“I should have prepared you for the announcement of my intention more carefully perhaps; but I too have suffered; and it seems to me that any delay now would be more agonising to both of us than the most abrupt decision. Am I right?”

There was still a latent hope in his heart that she would plead to him, and so press the reassuring truth home to his heart that he could not doubt her, that she was the bright, unsullied Stella whom he had loved and trusted. How closely he clung to this hope even he himself did not know until she had dashed it to the ground. Plead to him, extenuate her blameless course of life! No, she was too cruelly wronged to do it—she who had been so frank and true to him throughout.

“You are quite right.” The words fell like shots from her lips—clear, distinct, and rounded.

“You feel, with me, that it is better we should part; you feel that your life would be a burden to you if you passed it with me after this?”

“I feel, with you, that it is better we should part; I feel that my life would be a burden to me indeed after this.” With perfect precision, but not an atom

of feeling, she repeated his own words, as if they were a portion of a hard lesson he was teaching her. How could she put the expression in when all her energies were given to the task of retaining her reason.

"God help us both!" he muttered, and then a deadly whiteness covered her face, and she made a faint movement of her hand, as if to waive him away; and he had no choice but to obey, for had he not of his own free will surrendered the right of a husband to aid and serve and seek to comfort?

He turned wildly to the door, and his mother's arms met and encompassed him.

"Oh! my children, my children!" she moaned, "is this the end?"

"The beginning of the end, mother," he said, gently. "Help her, will you? take care of her, if you can; I have loved her better than my life."

Stella was too much outraged to attempt any vindication of herself—too much outraged indeed to inquire of what she was accused. The first fact that had been made manifest to her after a long and cruel illness was that her husband considered her too bad a woman to share his home and his heart any longer—considered her this, she knowing herself the while to be one purest, truest of women that ever lived.

That sin of loving the wrong man she had committed before she married, and the man she married had been cognisant and blithely regardless of it then, and she had not added to it since. Why, then, should she be punished and degraded for it now? This was the question she asked herself, and this is the light by which she looked at his conduct.

While for his part he accepted her resignation to what she considered his unjust will as evidence of her guilt—a fair example of the justice men and women mete out to one another.

Once or twice his mother made feeble efforts (how could they be other than feeble when, in her heart of hearts, she believed that the woman who would not speak could not clear herself from the charge that had been not brought but imagined against her)—once or twice old Mrs. Carhayes did make efforts that were symptomatic of a desire to set all going merry as a marriage bell again.

How many simple-hearted ones there are who combine an utter inability to organise the establishment of a ten-pound householder with a profound belief in their own capability of managing and directing, or at least influencing, the lives, the careers of those who are to them as “cowslip unto oxlip is, as water unto wine.”

All Mrs. Carhayes’s well-meant endeavours to set

about discovering a way out of this direful difficulty in which they were involved seemed too funny to Stella from one point of view—too funny to be seriously regarded or taken into account as far as possible means towards such a colossal end as the restoration of peace and good-will between the principals were concerned.

She knew—that quick creature who was lying there all throbbing blood and beating nerves—that the delay in the arrival of the arrowroot with a suspicion of port wine in it was caused by Mrs. Carhayes's futile endeavours outside the door to induce Arthur to bring it to her. Stella knew—none better—that the wealth of scentless flowers—Mrs. Carhayes had a horror of anything sweeter, in a sick room, than Rimmel's toilet vinegar and chloride of lime—was a sacrifice offered up by the kind mother on the altar of her son's love of fragrance and beauty. She—Mrs. Carhayes, senior—desired to make Stella suppose that they were free-will offerings for her pleasure from Arthur. And poor Stella, who knew that once these offerings would have been made in blessed reality, writhed under the seeming and hated the humbug even while she acknowledged that it was good-hearted, and was altogether hopelessly open-eyed and alive to the lightest shades of falsity and truth.

"When am I to leave?" she asked suddenly of her mother-in-law one day.

"To leave!—my dear, my dear!" the old lady stammered and surrendered.

"You know I am to leave," Stella said with her sweet eyes wide open to catch sight of a ray of hope—"you know I am to leave; Mr. Carhayes has settled it so, and——"

"And you, my child—you feel it must be so?" Mrs. Carhayes gasped out with all her son's meaning in her mind.

"I feel it must be so," Stella answered, with her face buried fast and hard in the pillow, and her voice under the absolute control which a woman can feign to have when all is lost save life, and still she clings unconsciously to that poor fact.

"Arthur has arranged it all with your lawyer, Stella." The old lady in this extremity did not think of speaking of Stella's "lawyer" as a biped with a local habitation and a name. She spoke of him as an abstract fact, who would further unpleasant events.

"Arthur has arranged it all with your lawyer, Stella—arranged it all for the best, if there is any 'best' in the affair. Oh, Stella, if you would only say something—if you would only seem to feel that things might be altered even now!"

"But they mightn't be altered—they couldn't be altered even now," Stella said, as calmly as a consciousness that the next syllable might, and probably would choke her would permit her to say it. "As he has arranged matters, so they shall always remain, without let or hindrance from me. Why, knowing these things to be inevitable, should we invariably speak about them?"

"Can we think of anything else, Stella, my poor child?"

"Don't call me that!" Stella cried, wincing in sudden agony. "You think of me as you never would have thought if I had been your own 'poor child' in reality."

Was not this speech "confirmation strong" of all her doubts? the poor, miserable, distraught old lady asked herself. Would it be wise, would it be kind, would it be womanly, to force a still clearer confession from the poor stricken creature, whom she at least would never desire to hunt down? What could she do when it came to this, that in one moment Stella might launch out some crushing, never-to-be-forgotten truth, but deprecate, and pity, and pray inwardly that Stella might not still further criminate herself?

Arthur Carhayes's powers of endurance broke down one day, and he confessed to his mother that,

in order to keep his resolution, he must remove himself from temptation.

"I must go away." There was such abject confession of weakness in the four words, that old Mrs. Carhayes prayed earnestly to be taught to answer aright. Was it her part to plead for forgiveness for that poor sinner upstairs?—or was "justice and no mercy" the creed she ought to preach? She inclined to the side of mercy: the inspiration to do so was a blessed one, she felt afterwards, when the dark days which have still to be chronicled came.

"Stay and hear from her if there is no hope, no ray of light in this darkness, Arthur."

"She is too truthful by nature to tell me a lie; she has deceived me, but never spoken a falsehood yet; why should I tempt her to do it now?"

"She has too truthful a nature." She was all on the side of mercy now, this good, kind woman whose own conduct had been above suspicion all the days of her life. "If she told you that you might take her back, you might take her back, Arthur, without the shadow of a doubt in your mind."

He shook his head moodily. His heart so longed to be convinced of Stella's integrity that he feared for his judgment.

"Don't throw your influence into that scale any

more, mother; help me to be strong, not weak. He is right who has written—

‘ I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who, either for his own or his children’s sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house :
For, being through his cowardice allowed
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She, like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd.’

Once more the gentle voice that had never counselled him amiss, pleaded for that poor creature whose fate was in the balance.

“But you do not know her false, my son?”

“May God spare me greater proof,” he said, in the bitterness of his jealous pain. “No, mother; I have been blindly confident over long; no mere animal passion shall lower me to the degraded position I should occupy in my own estimation, by clinging to a woman whom I believe to be unworthy to be the mother of my children. Thank Heaven we have no child!—there is infinite mercy in that.”

Then he went on to tell her that he should go away for a year, and that during his absence he wished her to secure for Stella a pleasant home in any part of the country in which Stella might desire to live. “I should advise that it be in some distant county,” he continued, “not only on account of my

own feelings, but that she may be spared the pain of the people about her being cognisant of her story. Will you tell her this? Will you also tell her that the whole of her fortune shall be placed at her own disposal?"

When the unwilling envoy repeated this to the woman who was to be banished, that woman asked—

"What name am I to bear?"

"I—your own, I suppose."

"My own! Do you mean Orme?"

"I meant Carhayes."

"I will not bear the name of a man who casts me forth from his home and his heart; I could not do it. I will take my maiden name again. Would to Heaven that I had never parted with it! That, at least, I have never disgraced."

It was natural again for the one who heard her words to look upon this as a clear acknowledgment of her guilt. The name of Orme at least she had never disgraced—surely this was an avowal that she had disgraced the name of Carhayes!

"Perhaps there would have been an awful weight of responsibility upon me if my boy had been guided by me," the mother thought, humbly; and a chill vapour of distrust arose again, and clouded her vision about Stella.

One day Stella rose and dressed herself, and, with

her hands and lips trembling violently with the exertion, began at once to pack away some clothes in a travelling trunk. Then she meekly told her mother-in-law that she was going.

“Going!—but there is no home prepared for you yet!”

“I can’t help it,” Stella said, wearily; “utterly broken down as I am, I have still some human longings. Isn’t it odd that I should care for fresh air and a change from this room?—but I do.”

“You can have those cravings satisfied, Stella; come out with me into the garden.”

Stella shook her head.

“I shall not move from this room till the carriage that is to take me away is at the door.

“My dear, the—the—a—I assure you the servants know nothing.”

“The servants! What can I care as to what the servants may know or be ignorant of? They know this at least, that I am a woman repudiated by my husband. It is not the servants that I would avoid, though.”

“Arthur left a week ago.” Mrs. Carhayes said the words in a very low voice and averted her eyes. Still she saw that Stella’s face, which had been flushed with weakness before, grew instantly pale as a datura blossom. Could it be that up to the moment

of this announcement being made to her she had nourished the hope of a reconciliation ?

Whatever the hope had been, however, she did not advert to it. She only said with the calm that comes of Giant Despair—

“Yet you tell me that the servants know nothing. Whatever their knowledge may be, their conjectures must be terribly near the truth. I have just escaped passing through death’s door, and your son”—she sedulously avoided calling him “my husband”—“has gone away, careless of whether I live or die. In mercy to me, let me get away from here at once. My brain may go if I stay, and I have still something to live and remain sane for.”

“That something was her lasting, ruinous love for Rupert Lyon, of course,” her mother-in-law thought. Would the girl never win strength enough to cast her sin from her? Would she never turn from it, and pray to be delivered from it? Then a new fear smote her.

This great anxiety to be gone, what did it mean? Was Stella weak and wicked enough to mean to follow and tempt the married man? Could she be saved from such an abyss of crime and wickedness as that? If she could, it should be done at any cost.

“Stella, shall I live with you, my dear?—will you

have me for the companion of your life?" she asked, eagerly. But her tone lacked the ring of tenderness, and Stella's keen ear was alive to the want.

"I am grateful, but I must say 'No.'" She spoke very firmly, and Mrs. Carhayes missed the sad undertone that would, if heard, have conveyed another impression to her mind.

"She will have no restraint," she thought, "and I must let her go her own way, sore as it makes my heart to see her do so, because I am powerless."

"Very well; but if ever you feel that you need a friend, Stella, don't forget the truest you ever had—not the wisest, perhaps, but the truest."

Stella left her husband's house one morning when the snow was on the ground and every tree was bare—every tree, but not every shrub. She took with her a large, glossy magnolia leaf.

"A queer thing for her lady to take a fancy to—showed that the fever had touched her head a little," her maid thought, as she tucked the carriage wrap round her mistress for the last time. And another proof of Stella's partial insanity, in the estimation of the maid, was that the feminine Prime Minister was left behind at Carhayes Place while the Queen went on her travels.

Stella had determined on this from the day that her husband proposed the separation. She would import

not one single element of her present life into her new one. In some obscure country place she would find a home where none would know her story, and there she would dwell, surrounded by new faces that would not look pity, and distrust, and contempt upon her, until such time as Heaven was more favourable to her.

Acting on the principle of the ostrich, which buries its own head, and then comes to the comforting conclusion that it is unseen, old Mrs. Carhayes took heart of grace in the thought that, as she had resolutely shut her eyes to the bewildered and suspicious expressions on the faces of the servants, so they in turn had not seen clearly what was going on. But now that Stella was gone it seemed to her that the time was ripe for some sort of an explanation to be given—an explanation which, when retailed, would not drag the name of Carhayes through the mud.

"Your master and mistress have had a most unhappy disagreement, and at present they have judged it best to part, Simpson," she said to their old butler. Poor woman! she would put off as long as possible the evil day of saying that the parting was final.

Stella went straight away to a tiny marsh-bound village on the sea-coast, a place in which there were not a hundred houses altogether, and which she had

selected because, in looking over an old gazetteer of that county, she had found mention made of an old Grange "as the chief object of interest in the hamlet." The Grange, luckily, was unoccupied, and in it she soon settled herself, and forthwith became the constant theme of, and the object of the wildest excitement to, the scattered inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

Here she led a simple quiet life—how full of regret and heart-pain who can tell?—for months, never writing a letter, and never receiving one—dead to the world that was saying very hard things of her by this time, and that was associating her disappearance with Rupert Lyon's as a matter of course.

By-and-by Spring came and brightened the gardens and fields, and put more colour into the sky and sea, and into her life. For she was young and impressionable, and beauty had power to warm her still, though she was a disgraced woman, and a very desolate one.

The first balmy day in May she was sitting out on the lawn reading one of the literary journals, when she saw the following advertisement—

"Now ready, 'Compensation,' a novel, in three volumes, by Arthur Carhayes and Ethel Huntingdon."

With a hard bitter laugh she flung the paper down.

"To have found compensation in her so soon, so

very soon, for the pain his brief remorse for his cruelty to me may have caused him! Where is the man worth a single pang of love or regret?" She asked this in the first agony of this outer darkness into which she had wandered.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Arthur Carhayes took himself away from his own home and out of reach of the temptation of being won to a softer mood towards the wife who was only unhappy and not erring as he thought her, it seemed to him that there was no light left in heaven or earth. Wronged and betrayed by the two beings he loved best in the world, his wife and his former friend, he had no belief left in the good that there is in every human being. He had no strength left to fight for the old faith that had once been his—that glorious old faith which holds that man born in the likeness of God is more frequently a sinner through force of circumstances than by evil inclination.

The selfishness which had been lying dormant—well concealed and admirably varnished over, but still there—came to the surface now in these sorrowful days that were at present his portion. He had been selfish long ago when he won poor Stella, not by the power of love, but by the power of reason—when he

stated his proposition that such love as his, asking for no return, must be a safe, unknown thing to try. He had been selfish when, his pertinacious arguments having carried the day against her purer instincts, he claimed that implicit confidence and obedience from her which only the love she could not give him could render. He had been selfish in his obstinate refusal to hear aught that might falsify the premises on which he justified his present course of action. Selfish in his love, selfish in his revenge, is it to be wondered at that he paid the penalty of the quality by being entirely miserable?

Such a blot on the fair successful surface of his life as this marring of his love-dream was! Such a foul, horrible blot! Put there, too, by the sorceress who had fed his appetite for brilliant success by glittering prophecies, by seductive avowals of the impossibility, as it appeared to her, that he should fail in anything! He had vivid memories of all these things, but such a faint recollection only of the frank opposition she had offered to the scheme which had entangled her in his life.

Through you, whom once I loved so well,
My hope is dead, my life's accursed,

he was wont to say, utterly oblivious of the fact that she had never been proved to be the accursed thing

he deemed her. In his vast self-pity, all feeling for others was submerged. The man with the beauty of a Greek statue, and a "rapturous feeling for art" in all its branches, could not stay to look at the reverse of the shield. He could not imagine that there could be "another side" of better aspect in the conduct of one who had, as he elected to believe, destroyed the drawing of his life.

While he was at the height of this bitter bad mood, Ethel Huntingdon's novel appeared, and was a good deal reviled, and fairly enough read, as the custom is when a new aspirant for public favour emerges from obscurity for the first time. Whether the censure that was heaped upon it in some journals, or the praise that was awarded to it in others, was just, is of little consequence. It is enough to say that the praise, in Ethel's estimation, out-beggared the blame. She was elated, even if she was not perfectly satisfied; and in her elation she wrote to Arthur Carhayes, the only literary man she knew, and demanded his sympathy.

"I don't want flattery or compliments," she wrote (she did want them, nevertheless—all women do); "but just tell me that my book has a germ of life and a touch of nature in it. At least tell me that, if you feel it; and if you don't feel it, don't say anything to

crush me. I love writing for writing's sake, and for money's sake, and for fame's sake ; and if any amount of hard work will make the last two mine, they will be mine. Papa has just bought twelve bullocks, that are to make his fortune, he tells me. I am sorry to say four of them have developed the foot-and-mouth disease. Send me every review you see, and accept the accompanying copy. I shall be more delighted than ever to see you now.—Yours truly,

“ ETHEL.”

It was very tempting—for he did firmly believe that in that signature was no guile ; in other words, he did really believe that Ethel Huntingdon was his as “ truly ” as a friend can be. There was no reason now why he should not go down to Clyst Abbott. That bright young fellow-labourer of his would be all the better for a little judicious and deftly-mingled criticism and encouragement. She belonged to the order of women who can bear both, and she was worth bestowing both upon. The prospect of the success of this young girl would be an object to him ; and surely he was justified in making such an one, now that his wife had blighted all the flowers that might have bloomed in his own career.

Thus he argued idly with himself, and he made no effort, it may be added, to refute the argument ;

so soon he was at Clyst Abbott again, Ethel's chosen friend, defiantly flaunted by the young lady in the face of the neighbourhood that had already condemned her so cruelly.

She knew nothing of his story when he came, nothing of that separation from his wife which made him such a dangerous friend for a young girl now; so when he had appeared unexpectedly one day, she asked him, naturally enough, how Mrs. Carhayes was.

"My mother is quite well," he answered, constrainedly.

"I mean your wife."

"She has left me. She has taken another name, and——Ethel, you will oblige me greatly by never speaking of her to me again. Each time you speak of her you will stab me to the heart, and——I have had pain enough, little friend."

Thereupon Ethel promised to obey him, and forthwith cast herself adrift upon a sea of conjecture, tossing about on which she was perpetually dashing herself against rocks of false surmises. The one on which she finally struck was that Mrs. Arthur Carhayes had eloped with Rupert Lyon. Stranded there, she became very gentle and pitiful to Arthur, and longed to ask him why he did not get a divorce, and dared not do it.

Out of the depths of her pitifulness the girl tried to divert him, to give his mind a fresh impetus, and spare him as much as she could of the misery of uninterrupted retrospective musings. She religiously devoted many hours of each day now to her work, and during these hours Mr. Carhayes was left to his own devices ; and they seemed to fail him. He did nothing, and he cared for nothing, save long solitary walks and smoking ; and at last Ethel's conscience smote her for the lethargy with which she had suffered him to fall into this groove.

So one day she made a proposition, rather timidly, but still hopefully, and he divined her motive and liked her for it. This time he had taken up his abode at the village inn, about half a mile from Clyst Abbott, and Ethel apparently thought that he had done well in going there—at any rate she never proposed that he should be their guest entirely again. But the day she made her proposition he had been lunching and dining with them ; and now, after dinner, he was standing moodily looking out through the window, while Ethel watched him uneasily.

Presently she said—

“I refused your help once—do you remember that ?”

“Refused my help, did you? Have I ever been in a situation to offer you help ?”

"It was about my writing: well, now I want help. I want it so much that I am going to ask for it. While you are staying here—you don't seem to be busy or I should never dare to ask—will you write a novel with me?"

He stared at her in silence for a few moments, and then laughed and asked—

"What in the world has put that in your head?"

"Oh! it isn't such a stupid thing to propose, I am sure; they say no woman, at least very few women, can depict a man, and a novel without a man would be an omelette without eggs. Now you draw the men's characters, and let me do the women and the descriptions."

"And how about the dialogue?" he asked, laughing. It would be pleasant and easy to help this girl, but he wanted to sound her first. Was her motive for asking him to give his aid a literary or a personal one?

"The dialogue? Well, I think that if I once grasped your conceptions I could make the men talk; but you would revise, wouldn't you? You would strengthen them if I let them get weak, and prop them up if they tumbled down altogether. Do help me."

He detested partnership in any literary transaction;

but the one who pleaded to be taken into that partnership now was gifted with a very winning way. Moreover, he knew that anything bearing his name would command such a price that Ethel's share in this would be a larger one than any unassisted efforts of hers would be likely to win for the next ten years. So being good-natured, selfishly good-natured, perhaps, he said—

"I will do it, Ethel, if you really think that my pen and my name can serve you. But what will Mrs. Grundy say?"

"Mrs. Grundy did her worst some time ago," she said, quietly, but he saw by the set, hard look that came like a mask over her face that the iron had entered into her soul. Then he questioned her, and gathered from her the story of the treatment she had received that day at Lady Agnes Lygard's "at home."

"There was only one person who was decently civil to me," she wound up vehemently. "Of course that one was a man."

"Who was he?" Arthur Carhayes was sorry for this one exception—sorry that Ethel should condescend to remember it—sorry that his indiscretion in having been so freely her friend on the occasion of his former visit should have injured her in the estimation of those near to whose tents she was doomed to

dwell—sorry for so many things that seemed and were unalterable and inevitable.

“He was a Mr. Grey. Hugo, his sister—a horrid woman, the wife of Mr. Arden, the vicar of some place near here—called him; a charming young fellow, full of chivalry and nice feeling.”

“Have you seen him since?” He asked the question with a suppressed eagerness that amused the girl.

“Often. He and I have struck up an alliance offensive and defensive; especially offensive it is to his sister, I am sure, for she nearly dislocates her neck by tossing her nose up in the air when she meets me in the roads.”

“Why do I never see him?”

“Because he doesn’t happen to be here just now; but in a week or two he will be back.”

“And when he comes, how will it fare with the novel that we are to write together?”

“Why, I wouldn’t neglect my work for an hour for the best man that ever lived—not even for you, Arthur. And though you are not the best man in the world, you are the nicest, and that appeals to me more. Hugo Grey is my out-of-door friend; the women who want to marry him to their daughters hate me for engrossing him as much as I can—and that is not a little—the one person in this region who has been kind and courteous.”

"I wish you had taken my advice and made some women friends," he said, in a vexed tone. "It is all very well, Ethel, this sort of thing, while you are young, but it won't do by-and-by, my little friend; it won't, I assure you."

"What do you mean by 'this sort of thing'?—and why won't it do?" she asked, coolly.

"Friendships with young men don't do—call them and claim them to be as platonic and proper as you like."

"Yet you formed one with me—feeling that!"

"I am a married man."

"Oh! folly," she cried, angrily. "You were not that when you became acquainted with me first, and how little you seem it now! Don't fall into the greater error of thinking that I blame you; I don't do that, but I wonder that you can so calmly lay down laws that you have broken so easily. If it doesn't do with Hugo Grey, how could it have been right with you—this friendship that you seem to think so detrimental?"

"You speak like a girl who has seen nothing of society."

"Heaven help me, I have seen enough of it. It has made me wiser and long to hide my head—not because I felt guilty of anything, but because I could not bear to be looked askance at by a dog, much more by my fellow-creatures. And now you come and tell

me that the women who hurt me so are the ones I should have cultivated!"

"They wouldn't have hurt you so if you had cultivated them," Arthur said, astutely; and she shrugged her shoulders, and answered—

"And what should I have gained, even if groveling had rewarded me with the boon of their countenance? Stop! I shouldn't have valued it, Arthur. I have never yet in my life valued any utterly vain and unworthy thing; and what else would the friendship, the 'countenance,' you call it—of these women have been to me? I say to them, as Chastelard said to the queen whose tender mercies brought him to a worse strait than any cruelty from her could have done, 'Do I not know thee to the bone?' Do I not know them to the bone—ay, and the marrow of the same? Do I not know all that in them lies—all their small ambitions and agonies about their bosom friends being better dressed, and better^d dined, and better disgraced—this last through the small social successes they obtain through much tribulation—than themselves?"

"Some of these women are good wives and mothers," he said, quietly.

"Are they? I doubt it. Not what I should call good; for they will bring their children up to act according to such narrow lights—to hope for such

petty rewards. It is not for anything noble in itself that they call down their sister-women's worst curse for cruelty upon them ; it is only that they may stand well, as they call it, that they may retain the power of blackballing for archery and croquet—that they may ride rough-shod, in their coarse, inartistic way, over the heads of the women who feel——”

“How you hate some one !”

“No—there you are wrong, clear-sighted as you are ; it is not some one, but the class, the clique, the many who band their weakness together to make strength. Arthur, I would rather—when you are at your best, which you are not now—have your approval than I would have that of the sainted ladies who stigmatise me as fast, vain, and unregenerate, because I believe that you would never give me your approval if I did not deserve it.”

Such craving for his approval was an awful temptation to a man situated to bestow it as was Arthur Carhayes. And yet—and yet, he thought her so wholly wrong in the deductions that she drew from the premises she put forward in such a strong light. It was an awful temptation to him ; he did long to bestow his approval so very much. But—happily for them both—some back thoughts stepped in, some thoughts of the grand, frank creature who was still his wife, and who would have loathed the pettiness of

the revolt that Ethel was ready to make. Stella, clear-visioned Stella, would never have dreamed of visiting the folly of the few on the many, or rather on herself in reality; for all these feeble, impassioned efforts to set things straight simply resolve themselves into the foolish action of biting off one's nose to spite one's face. So these back thoughts of Stella—these angels unawares stealing in—saved him from the calamity of approving of Ethel's demeanour.

"Their approval and their companionship would give you what mine never can give you, my dear Ethel—a stand-point, a haven of refuge."

"I'll make them for myself."

"Nonsense! no girl can do that; you must make the best of your own sex, Ethel. The majority of them are not 'nice,' as you call it—I grant that; but they are very potent, and the sooner you knock under to that potency, and seem to seek to be swayed by them, the sooner you will be that exceptional thing, a popular authoress with a good reputation."

He smiled the small cynical smile he had learned lately, and he spoke in the gay and airy tone in which men do speak great truths sometimes; but, for all the cynicism and the light airiness, Ethel knew that he meant what he said, and she experienced a dull, disappointed sensation—the sort of sensation one has on finding out that one's highest aim is very

lowly regarded by the person one loves best in the world.

"You would have me stultify myself, lose all the individuality I possess, waste my time, and—bore myself to death for the sake of winning the toleration of those people who can never serve me, never satisfy me, never please me," she said, indignantly. "I don't say that I could surely win them, but I suppose I could if I tried. You are harder to please, more fastidious in your requirements, than they are; and I could win you if I tried."

"You foolish child!"—he caught her hands, and looked at her steadily—"what would you do with me if you did win me? Have you thought of that?"

She had never "thought of that" until this moment; but she was a clever girl, not one who could be taken at a disadvantage.

"If I won you, I would hand you over to the only woman in the world who is worthy of you," she said, boldly, and the allusion to his wife steadied her nerves, though it shook his. "But we are talking now in sober earnest, and not in fun," she went on quickly. "Why should I seek to please those who prejudged me unfavourably? Where would be my gain?"

And then she related to him over again the story of the garden party at the "Highlands" when Lady Agnes Lygard was "at home," and he knew that the woman who had smarted under this social castigation once, could never, without loss of self-respect, subject herself to it again.

"Moreover, what should I gain if they all accepted me as one of themselves, Arthur?" she urged in conclusion. "I hate dulness and monotony, and did you ever go to a garden party in the country that was not dull and monotonous to a most demoralizing degree? The active young people play croquet, and the dozy old ones dream dreams under the trees; and they never by chance utter a word that I care to hear; and I never by chance utter a word that they care to hear; and I tire myself in their society—for nothing fatigues one like being bored—and unfit myself for what I believe to be my duty. Don't waste your eloquence in trying to induce me to burn my candle in order the better to play such a poor game."

He did not quite believe her. He could not readily believe that any woman would drift out of any society in which she might find herself without making an effort to remain in it. Still the mere assumption of these sentiments marked her out as a ready recipient of some even freer notions.

If the girl really regarded the world as well lost for so small a thing as the freedom she had lost it for, he surely need have no scruples about compromising her by this continued and close friendship.

This is how he began.

The end of it may not be told yet. But this is the way in which it came about that they wrote their novel "Compensation" together. The story dealt with the lives of a couple of artists—a man and a woman—who found in their art compensation for the slights the world was ever ready to offer them; and Ethel Huntingdon and Arthur Carhayes flung themselves with all their force of feeling into that which the girl had experienced and the man had comprehended.

Their work brought them constantly together, and made them know one another better than any ordinary intercourse could have done. The free fraternal relations between them were kept up unimpaired for a time. But gradually a slight element of restraint was infused into Ethel's manner. She did not call him "Mr. Carhayes" again, but she ceased to call him "Arthur," and the one fact was significant as the other would have been. She ceased, too, to drive him about the country in the way that had so scandalized society when he had been their guest on a previous occasion.

One day he asked her, "Why this change?"—asked the question in semi-reproachful manner that made her blush and hesitate before she answered,

"Because I think it better."

"But, after all, it was pleasant to both of us, Ethel; and you know you don't value the opinion of the people who looked grimly upon you for doing it. Moreover, the mischief—if mischief there is—is done now. Mrs. Grundy once set at nought never relents; like all narrow-minded people, she is unforgiving, implacable."

"I am not afraid of Mrs. Grundy."

"Then of whom are you afraid?"

"Of myself," she said, hastily; and then she went out of the room, and Arthur Carhayes saw her no more that day.

Some few days elapsed before they met again, and then the man had come to a conclusion. His own life was laid waste by the perfidy of a woman whose perfidy no court of justice could punish her for; consequently, though fettered, he was in one sense free.

This was his view of his own case. He looked upon Ethel in this light.

He saw her a woman innocent of all offence against society, and yet ousted by society from all those privileges of intercourse with her own order which women

hold dear. She would gain nothing if she remained as she was ; she would lose nothing if she gained him for a friend.

She saw that the climax had come when he met her, and she strove to avert it by beginning to speak of her manuscript.

" I can't listen to ' Compensation ' to-night, Ethel," he interrupted, " until I know whether or not there is any compensation in the world left for me, for all I have suffered."

" Plenty, if you only look for it in the right place," she said, bravely.

" I think I have found the right place, but I may be mistaken ; you know how I adored Stella, you do not know how she has cut my heart to pieces, and dishonoured me ; in you I have found a friend."

" Who will be a true one, and counsel you to do nothing that may dishonour yourself," she said, tremblingly.

" Will you be my friend for life ; will you prove to me that your heart clings to me more closely than it does to the world that has already judged and sentenced you ? "

CHAPTER X.

THERE had been a time when the appeal for her entire and unreserved friendship made by Arthur Carhayes would have been answered with fatal promptitude by Ethel Huntingdon. The girl liked him exceedingly. For the gratification of that liking at no very remote period of this history, she would have been rash, foolish, and imprudent. But she had learned some good lessons lately. One of the best of them was this, that, if she did not wish the world to hurt her, she must not put weapons into its hand that she herself had poisoned.

And so, when he made his request, she paused before venturing on a reply. Presently she held out her hand to him.

“Shake hands before we say a word more. There now, I feel we are friends in a true sense, and you will understand that I am not angry——”

He began to explain, or rather to attempt to explain; but the girl was so sad, and so sensible, that

he soon felt it would be better to bring his apologies and his visit to an end at once. "I suppose I had better get myself away from the neighbourhood as soon as possible," he said, sulkily.

"If you take my advice, you will do nothing of the kind, Arthur; you will be safer here—safer and better here than you would be anywhere else just now. I shall always be inciting you to work."

"What excellent order you have yourself in!"

"Don't sneer at me."

"Very few women would care or dare to speak as you are speaking now."

"I believe that. A few months ago I certainly should not have cared to speak thus; I had no ambition then to be anything more than a loved and admired woman. And—I will be quite truthful, because in my truthfulness lies my safety—I would have been as frivolous as you pleased. But now I want to touch a noble aim. I want to be able to stand the strongest light that may beat upon me."

"At the same time, if you keep up an intimacy with me—a man who is separated from his wife—your purest actions will be viewed askance. You fail even now to understand the world."

"Ah! that is where you do not comprehend me," she argued, earnestly. "I am not acting now, Arthur; I am very much in earnest. I want to live

honourably, not to seem to live honourably ; while you, without caring much about it either way, want to revenge yourself for a mistake, and both to be and seem worse than it is in your nature to be. Now I am going to write."

Thus abruptly she brought to a conclusion the only conversation in the course of which Arthur Carhayes did injustice both to himself and to her. She had liked him so long, she had loved him so well when he was free, that she felt the task of maintaining her *nonchalance* a hard one. But she had maintained it, and she was safe—safe, and able to look Mrs. Grundy in the face with an unlowered crest. Which same conscious innocence and integrity was mistaken by the astute ones for defiant hardihood, and estimated accordingly.

When she found herself alone, she did cry a little over the way in which she had been compelled to say "farewell the old romance."

Arthur Carhayes had been very dear to her once. And now he had given her such a painfully realistic mental photograph of himself. While he had anything to lose, he had been so forbearingly her friend only ; now, when he deemed he had nothing more to lose, he had shown himself selfish and unstable as water.

"He is selfish," she whimpered, "but he is a good

fellow; and, if I can, I will help him against himself. He will understand me better when he is happy with his wife again."

So they went on, writing and reading together, until "Compensation" was finished, and, as has been said, no flirtation sullied their communion. And, just as it was "ready this day," according to the advertisements, Hugo Grey came back into the neighbourhood, as the guest of his sister, Mrs. Arden.

He had been away from that narrow, self-absorbed country clique so long, that he came back oblivious of its likes and dislikes, its loves and hates, its rules of right and wrong—came back, and daringly mentioned things that it held unmentionable, and refused to bow the knee to some of its false gods, as people are apt to do after breathing another atmosphere.

"Lady Agnes will be at home to-morrow from four to six," his sister said to him, at dinner, on the night of his arrival.

"Terrible old lady! I owe her one good thing, though—she did introduce me to Miss Huntingdon."

"Hugo!"

"What is the matter with you, Gracie?" he asked, laughingly, disregarding the twist his reverend and wearisome brother-in-law endeavoured to give to the conversation by informing those assembled that he "had been much interested that day by hearing

some unknown but illustrious professor lecture on the development of fungi in the thorax of living butterflies."

"Miss Huntingdon is a person whom no man need congratulate himself upon knowing," the sister said with sisterly severity.

"There is a perverse vein in the majority of men that would make them do it though, Gracie; seeing that she is young, and pretty, and clever."

"Pretty and clever! preposterous nonsense, Hugo. She'll be very coarse in a few years; dark women never wear well; and as for her being clever, what proof have we that she is anything of the kind?"

Mrs. Arden disliked Ethel with the unreasoning dislike a biting sense of conscious mental inferiority gives the one who labours under it. She (Mrs. Arden) would have denied the girl the possession of one respectable quality, and have condemned her to a reformatory had she but the power to do so. And this because Ethel was unmistakably outside the social line within which Mrs. Arden had the strength to hurt. It stung that lady sharply when, in answer to her triumphant words, "What proof have we that she is anything of the kind?" her brother answered—

"My dear child, if you read a little more and fussed about your husband's parish a little less, you

would know that Miss Huntingdon has given very good proof that she possesses brilliant ability."

"I am sure I have heard such things of that book, Hugo. I wonder that you are not ashamed to mention it to me: it is a book that no young girl ought to have written, people say; perverting her talents in that way is more disgraceful than if she let them lie idle."

"You dodge about in your argument so, that I don't follow you. Just now you denied her the possession of talent, now you say she perverts it; which do you mean?"

"I mean what I say."

"You say contradictory things."

"Hugo, you are bent on provoking me, evidently. I have no patience with the girl's giving herself airs of being always employed, in such a vulgarly pretentious way; she does it, I am sure, in order to try to deceive people into thinking that she doesn't care for the neighbourhood having cut her."

"As you like; have it your own way, Gracie. I will judge for myself when I call at Clyst Abbott to-day."

"Shall you call there?"

"Unquestionably I shall. I tell you, fairly, I shall never miss an opportunity of seeing Miss Huntingdon."

"Then you shall not rush into the intimacy blind-fold," Mrs. Arden said, with a little shiver of anger. "If you are weak enough to believe her clever because she has foisted one bookful of wretched trash on the public, you shall at least hear that all her cleverness does not save her from openly scandalising people. That Mr. Carhayes is there again—at least, he stays at the inn, but he is incessantly writing and reading with Miss Ethel. It is glaring, such conduct." Mrs. Arden gave an emotional gulp, and stopped for want of breath.

"I see that Miss Huntingdon and Carhayes have done a book together," Hugo said, but his tone was a little constrained.

"Oh, it is atrocious!" Mrs. Arden went on, warmly. "His wife has left him on account of it, poor thing!"

"That I don't believe, Gracie; that, on my word, is more than you or any one else shall say of Miss Huntingdon in my hearing. The girl is brave and unconventional, and she has learned more of life than many girls of her age through the exigencies of her circumstances."

"Oh, I know nothing of Miss Huntingdon's antecedents," Mrs. Arden interrupted, bitterly. "I judge her by her present conduct, not by her past. If she had been modest and humble when she came here

first, and had shown a desire to be noticed, we should have taken her by the hand ; but after the course she has pursued—well, I will only say, if you persist in going to see her, don't distress me by telling me of it, for, as your sister, I should be very awkwardly placed, especially with the Lygards."

"Bother the Lygards!" Hugo said, irreverently. "You blame Miss Huntingdon for Heaven knows what, but you haven't a word of censure for a girl who tried to collar a fellow, whether he would or not, as Miss Lygard tried to collar me."

"Really, Hugo—before the children too!"

"You said worse about the other girl before the children," Hugo cried, starting up ; and then he went away to the stable, and his sister wasted an hour or two that morning in peeping from the window to see him ride away to Clyst Abbott and destruction.

"Compensation" had come down in several sets of green and gold from the publishers the night before, and the joint authors were looking at their work in print, and laughing the uneasy laugh that is customary over the blunders that are unalterable now.

They were sitting in Ethel's drawing-room, and the window was open, for early Spring was upon the earth again, and her first breath, laden with the perfume of violets and primroses, was so sweet, that they were willing to endure the slight chill there still

was in the air, for the sake of the odour that accompanied it.

"Our work is done," Ethel said, abruptly throwing down the third volume. "When are you going away?"

"Going away! I haven't thought of going."

"I have for you. It sounds ungrateful, doesn't it, after having so contentedly blended your brains with mine for such a long time; but I am impatient for you to go; I am longing to see if I can fly alone. It will be hard work after having had your aid at every turn; but I must try sooner or later, and the sooner the better."

"You will fly high enough without any aid of mine," he said, moodily; "the breaking of the literary link will cost me more than it will you."

"The link will never be broken. My first, best friend in the new life I am living in my art, how can it be? Why, if I married to-morrow, the link would be as strong as ever. You will always be the man who helped me to work my mine: the metal may turn out gold, or it may be something much baser, but it will always be very precious to me."

"Your youth makes you say that and feel it," he said, gloomily; "you think in your enthusiasm that if you married to-morrow, you would still turn to me for sympathy and criticism. My dear child, what

a child you are still, not to realise that even if the man you marry has not an idea in his head, you will take his opinion on the æsthetic, and draw upon his experience for the practical portions of your novel. Who is our gallant cavalier coming up the drive?"

Was it due to the words he had just uttered relative to the inevitable change in her when she married, or to the sight of the gallant cavalier, that a crimson blush made her face more lustrously blooming than ever as she answered—

"It is Mr. Grey."

"You were right in telling me that it was time I should go, Ethel." He spoke in a very low tone, and Ethel knew that he was getting dull and lonely.

"I did not know he was here when I advised you to go," she said, energetically.

"Is he 'he' already, Ethel? Well, I am not saint enough to wish him God-speed in his wooing, but if it comes to this, that he wins you, I hope you will make each other happier than I——"

"Don't, Arthur."

"Well, 'an it pleases you,' I won't revert to the time when I might have finished that sentence in all honour. Do you remember what a man who has had some experience in love says of a lost opportunity?—

“ Oh, cursed after-wisdom, which displays
In glaring light our then clandestine folly !
What though success befool our head with bays,
Or failure steep in wassail, veil with holly
Our tell-tale brows ? There doggeth all our ways
Persistent, retrospective melancholy,
Making more bitter e'en the brilliant lot
With ‘ Fool, it might have been—it is not ! ’ ”

He did not explain to her more definitely than this what “ might have been,” but she knew that he was referring to that time before his marriage when she would have been ready at a moment's notice to follow him through the world if he had only held his finger up. That was not so very long ago. And now her heart was beating and her face flushing with pleasure at the approach of another man !

In describing a woman's character after all, if we “ nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice,” the only conclusion we can conscientiously arrive at, is the absolute truth, the supreme truth of the lines—

And yet, believe me, good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a contradiction still.

It certainly looked like “ confirmation strong ” of the poison Mrs. Arden had been striving to pour into Hugo's ears, that scene upon which he entered. The actors in it were so entirely sympathetic and so well accustomed to each other, that there was about them

an air of greater intimacy than really existed. Ethel now was seated by the window in a low lounging chair, and Mr. Carhayes was leaning on the arm of the same in order that they might look at the same volume, and detect printers' errors. So had he leaned and looked over proofs with her dozens of times, and she had never given a thought to the possible construction which might be put upon the position. But now, as Hugo Grey came forward, she felt that she shrank aside in embarrassment from the arm of the chair on which Arthur was leaning.

It was but a temporary embarrassment though, and she did herself the justice of recovering from it immediately, and tried to put the two men on an outwardly fair footing without delay.

"Mr. Grey, let me introduce you to my friend and *collaborateur*, Mr. Carhayes," she began at once. "Do you see what a tremendous lift he has given me in public estimation, by allowing my name to appear on the same title-page with his?"

"I should think that you had no need of a lift in public estimation, Miss Huntingdon," Grey said, with the sort of blind faith a man is apt to have in the power of the woman he loves, especially if he be not endowed with very keen critical acumen.

"At any rate, we found writing half a thin volume more agreeable work than writing a whole one, didn't

we, Ethel?" Arthur Carhayes put in good-humouredly. It was, somehow or other, soothing to him to find that Hugo Grey was considerably less clever than himself. He had been a god to Ethel for a long time, and it was but natural for Arthur Carhayes to dislike giving up his godship in favour of another.

"It was much more agreeable." Ethel had registered a vow that nothing should ever make her shrink from the admission of the great joy Arthur's society had been to her. "I'll never try to tone down or take a bit of the colour and warmth out of our friendship," she had said to herself; and, as she was not a coward, probably she would keep her word.

"It was much more agreeable. I shall miss you dreadfully, Arthur. I shall feel my wings so weak when I begin to fly alone."

"Are you going to leave this neighbourhood soon?" Hugo asked, suavely.

"In a few minutes I am off somewhere—I hardly know where yet. Halloo! this is an eventful morning for Clyst Abbott. I see one of the telegraph office boys coming up the drive."

"Who can possibly send a telegram to us?" Ethel said, indifferently. "It must be for papa, announcing the approach of more bullocks."

But when the telegram was brought in, it was found

to be for Arthur from his mother, informing him that his wife was very ill, and that he was the father of a son.

He managed to suppress the exclamation which rose to his lips, and, calling Ethel out of the room, he showed her the telegram.

"My faithful little friend, what shall I do?" he asked.

"Thank God for everything, and then go to her at once," she answered, promptly.

CHAPTER XI.

DURING all these months how had it been faring with our friends at Manchester?

A little way out of the town, on a breezy eminence, separated from the road by a thick belt of flourishing larches, the house of Rupert Lyon, the artist, stands.

The whole aspect of the place is as flourishing as the larches. Massive, richly designed, and well wrought scroll-work iron gates, between portly stone pillars, open into a shrubbery, through which a drive winds for a hundred yards. Then the shrubs cease, and a level lawn appears. There is a croquet ground at one end, and four or five flower-beds of graceful shape break the monotony of green. A huge Spanish chestnut tree gives the requisite shade and relief to the flat expanse on one side, and a mulberry tree rears its head loftily on the other. The house stands squarely to the lawn, a handsome modern erection, with French windows of plate glass opening upon a piazza. The

plate glass windows glitter in the bright Spring sun. Mrs. Lyon is proud of her house, and the windows are duly cleaned.

As is every other part of the house; for Rupert Lyon is prospering, and there is no lack of service in the house, and under Barbara's skilful supervision her household staff works admirably. She has induced Rupert to sell all the old carved oak furniture and all the antique "rubbish," as she called his bits of tapestry and graven goblets of Venice glass. And the house is now furnished entirely according to her taste. Rupert's studio is the only apartment the treatment of which indicates that an artist dwells in that house.

The entrance-hall is handsome, light and airy, paved with Minton's tiles, and furnished with a fine marble table, a hat and umbrella stand, and four chairs of the regulation shape. The dining-room is "in mahogany and crimson damask," as Mrs. Lyon expresses it, and is hung with engravings selected by Bab herself. A clock, two vases, and two lustres stand on the mantelpiece before a big mirror that, big as it is, sinks into nothingness inside its frame. The red and green carpet is partially covered with a crumb-cloth on which never a crumb is seen. Rupert Lyon, from the moment the room was arranged, made a point of never letting his eyes stray from the table.

The drawing-room is another triumph. Bab is very fond of bright colours; most women who are drab themselves, are fond of a contrast. The canary-coloured silk which covers the puffy fat chairs and couches makes one wink on first entering the room. The carpet is green moss with canary coloured roses about it. Twelve brackets in the form of fern leaves, with a dash of gilding on them, support twelve china figures of ladies and gentlemen in vivid costumes under glass shades. Literature is represented by twelve Books of Beauty in gorgeous bindings. This is the house of Rupert Lyon, the artist.

Was he happy? No one seeing him at work, when he felt himself unobserved, would have needed to ask the question. The gloom and the disappointment stood out in strong relief then, as it came home that he could never realize in his own life and surroundings a tithe of the beauty he was portraying on the canvas before him. But he needed a peaceful life in order to work well; and so to secure it he suffered Bab to have canary-coloured furniture, and everything else she liked.

Outside her house and her household, Bab was a very unexacting woman. She never objected to or protested against the sight of Stella's gorgeous beauty in a multitude of shapes and under a multitude of names on her husband's canvases. When questioned

about that everlasting "same lady," she answered rather nobly than otherwise—

"Oh, yes; it is a lady Mr. Lyon admires more than any one else in the world; and artists must have models, you know, if they want a touch of life."

This was one of Rupert's own sentences revised by his wife, and it did good strong service in proving her "not jealous," and Mr. Lyon a very good husband—"indeed, a much better husband in point of fact than is often to be found in the ranks of professionals, my dear," as more than one "lady of the land" observed to another.

"Artists must have models if they want a touch of life." And she was still the one woman in the world who had the power to vitalize his most beautiful imaginings. But, for all that, the image of the "Belle-Aurore" had a powerful rival in his manly love of comfort, order, and peace.

Not that he was lapsing into a state of forgetfulness of her. He remembered her still, at times vividly, but he was getting to feel that love was not the beginning and the end of everything, as he had once believed it to be, during the halcyon days when Stella Orme was luring him on. He had come to the sensible pass now of being able to appreciate a well-arranged dinner, and of being ready to commend Bab's true judgment in the choice of viands. His wife was a

very clever manager, and he highly approved of the results of her management, and suffered all that dark past through which she had sneaked to be buried in oblivion.

They had one child, a material embodiment of the sweet conception he had once formed in his days of infatuation of what Stella must have been as a child—a bewitching little creature, rich with a fulness of earthly beauty, whom he had called “Ninon,” much to the disgust of Bab, who could associate the name only with the character of a woman who had, by her excellent fooling, once turned the brain of her own grandson.

And Ninon gave Rupert an immense amount of pleasure, and caused him to feel his life very well worth having. All which makes it plain that it is entirely possible for a man to be happy and contented while the woman he once coveted is, for his sake, missing every other joy and happiness in life.

Ninon had a beauty that bid fair to grow and become as valuable to her father as Stella’s had been. It was earthly beauty, glorious, substantial beauty, of the richest, most voluptuous type. Her eyes were not so much “stars of morning” as they were rich luscious grapes of purple hue. Her mouth, wide open at the corners, and arched like a bow, was a mouth the kiss of which, once given, would never be forgotten. In

her face was the glow, and warmth, and intensity of colour that one could feel. The child was like pomegranate fruit, ripe, warm, fragrant. And Bab was her mother! Small wonder that the father of such a child should begin to think that it was immaterial what woman was his wife.

His life was very full of work, and work satisfies so many wants, and fills so many aching voids. And in the pauses of his work he had such absolute comfort at command. If he had been starving, and subject to the inroads of a dirty-handed maid-of-all-work, perhaps he would have regretted Stella, and all that Stella represented, much more.

The Lyons were going to have a dinner party this night. There had been an art and industrial gathering at Manchester during the past week, and the professors of the first branch were still scattering themselves over one of the centres of industry. Naturally Rupert desired to assemble these fellow-workers of his about his table. And naturally they, knowing that the table would be well supplied, were desirous of coming.

Bab had designed a wonderful repast. The feast of reason and flow of soul are all very well with the accompaniments of cool wines and hot dishes, but without these latter the most intellectual entertainments fall flat. Bab had learned how to cater

successfully for artistic tastes in one way, at any rate.

And she was a marvellously contented woman. It was enough for her to sit at the head of her table, and see that that which she had provided was appreciated. She never attempted to join in conversation. She just kept things in well-appointed order ; and men as a rule thoroughly understand the advantages of the order that a woman can originate and maintain.

It was a man's dinner party. Bab was the only lady present at it—a delightful arrangement for one lady when she has the power and the will to queen it. But Bab had neither. Her mind on this occasion was distraught by a little question of etiquette. Ought the servant to fill her glass with wine every time, just as he did the gentlemen's glasses, or ought he not? A great authority has laid it down as a rule that the glass should always be filled ; but Bab felt very uncertain, and wished that she had the courage to strike out a line of her own in the matter.

But she had not the courage, and so she sat through the difficulty dumbly, growing murky red in the face under the combined influence of wine which she drank against her will, and uncertainty ; and Rupert talked to his friends unassisted—unassisted, that is, by his wife.

She retired at the right moment. This, at least,

she had learned from the ladies among whom she was living, that to leave them early was the surest way to their lords' regard. So she got herself away from the dinner-table to her canary-coloured room in very good time.

It was a spacious and light room, as has been said, and dust, the smallest particle of dust, made a great show in it. Now Bab had a keen eye for all such blemishes on good housekeeping; she and dust waged perpetual warfare, so to speak, and it may be said that she kept her enemy well at bay, though to utterly rout and annihilate him was beyond the prowess of women. So now, feeling sure that she had a good clear hour to herself before the gentlemen would join her, she drew a little feather brush from a canary-covered ottoman, and proceeded to pass it with loving and tender care over her household gods.

"Servants have no eyes," she was murmuring to herself as her gaze fell on a batch of evening papers thrown carelessly down on the dazzling surface of the couch—"there's nothing so soiling as printer's ink."

With a sigh of relief she saw that no shadow of a stain was left, and then she sat down and read the list of births. The first column of the *Times* was the only literature she ever indulged in—not that she expected to find any mention therein of any one whom

she knew, but the mere list of names afforded her a certain sort of pleasure, and was no strain on her intellect.

But to-night she read something that brought more of the murky colour into her face. It was as follows:—

“On the 6th instant, at The Grange, Bellfield, the wife of Arthur Carhayes, Esq., of Carhayes Place, of a son.”

By-and-by the mail came in, and tea was handed round, and the evening telegrams gossiped about. Rupert had the *Times* in his hand for half an hour, and during that time he scanned every column but the first one. Bab knew that it would be hers to tell him this bit of news. She did not know much of men, but she knew enough of them to feel sure that Rupert would owe the first knowledge of that birth to her.

The guests left, and Mr. Lyon was lounging out of the room, intending to go to his studio for an hour or two, when Bab's voice, with a certain unwonted ring of triumph in it, arrested him.

“I have some news to tell you about an old friend, Rupert.”

“Ah!” For a moment he was startled—for a moment a fiercely vivid remembrance of Stella shot through him. Was she dead, that beauty who had

loved him, and whom he had loved so long ago? As was natural, the Lyons were not a pair at all in the habit of indulging in retrospective conversation. They never by any chance alluded to what was past. It staggered him to hear Barbara speak thus openly of an "old friend."

"Mrs. Arthur Carhayes has a son."

"Has she?" The relief of finding that she was not dead was so infinite, that his heart bounded again, and he felt that his face betrayed emotion. It is never pleasant to a man to hear that a woman that he has adored is the mother of another man's child. But in this case, so great had been his dread of hearing that Stella was dead, that he had no other sensation than that of thankfulness when he heard what had really befallen her.

"Yes; would you like to read it, Rupert? Not in her husband's house, you see."

He took the paper from her, and glanced over the paragraph, and his wife, watching him, saw that his hand trembled. For all his quietness and apparent contentment, then, "that" woman—the thought of "that" woman—still had the power to stir him.

"I see," he said presently. "Well, God bless her and the boy!" and then he went away to his studio, and tried to work, and Barbara sat alone with bitter thoughts in her heart.

If he had said more about it, if he had speculated as to why it had not been arranged that the heir of Carhayes should have been born in the home of his fathers, she would have been better satisfied. As it was, she kept on probing her sense of injury by telling herself that "still waters run deep," and other wise saws of a kindred nature. Doubtless, now, Rupert had gone away to make a sketch of Mrs. Carhayes as a Madonna, or some nonsense of the kind. Mrs. Lyon, ordinarily so patient about Rupert's everlasting idealizations of Stella's face, felt aggrieved now, and conjured up an aggravating scene of Rupert bemoaning him before a fresh faint vision of the old love.

Finally, when she had worried herself for about two hours, and had finished the needlework which she had set herself the task of doing this night, she rose up and went to the studio, ready to say some bitter words.

It has been told that Rupert "tried to work." It must be borne in mind that he had dined, and that the hour was late. Barbara's purpose changed, and her heart grew lighter, when, on softly opening the door of the studio, she saw her husband's recumbent form stretched on the sofa, fast asleep.

After all, the spell an absent idol holds over the

heart of man is feeble and weak compared to, and easily exorcised by, the habit of his everyday life.

The hope that had kept Stella from utter despair during the past weary months had been the hope that she and her child would die in her hour of trial. But as soon as her boy was born another hope took possession of her, namely, that she might live to train him up to be a good man—a son of whom Arthur would be proud, though he had been so cruel to the mother.

Fraught with this hope, she became cheerful, and garnered up her strength, and despatched a telegraphic request to old Mrs. Carhayes to come and see her grandson.

When the grandmother came, there was naturally much to say and hear that was painful to women. But Stella was very brave, save about one thing. It was several days before she could bring herself to mention her husband.

“Where is your son?” she asked at last; and it cost old Mrs. Carhayes a mighty effort before she could reply indifferently—

“He is at Clyst Abbott; I have been waiting for you to tell me to send for him, dear.”

“At Clyst Abbott!”—the face that had been so sweet and cheerful lately grew suddenly discomposed

and angry. "As he is there, there let him remain. I will not send for him."

"My darling Stella, if you had only told him about this when you—when he—when that unhappy difference arose,—if you had only told him then that—all this misery would have been averted."

Old Mrs. Carhayes had cast aside all doubt of her son's wife from the moment that the latter had put the baby into her (old Mrs. Carhayes') arms, with the words—"He is your only grandson; love him, though you have no love left for me."

The intuition of the Woman told the Mother that no guilty wife could have used those words.

"Surely," she thought, "when I tell that to Arthur, he will be convinced," and she conjured up a picture of domestic peace at Carhayes Place—a picture that was doomed to be torn to tatters by Stella's indignant words of refusal to have him sent for from Clyst Abbott.

"Miss Huntingdon is a beautiful, unscrupulous flirt. Your son would not have gone to her for comfort—if he needed any—when we parted, if he had ever desired that we should meet again. Has he been there long?"

"They have been writing a book together," Mrs. Carhayes answered, in a half frightened tone; and then Stella burst out crying—for though she did not

love her husband, she longed to respect the father of her boy. It was too bitterly hard and cruel to think of Arthur under the influence and at the feet of the Ethel Huntingdon she had known.

Grief and crying combined to make her very ill, and, when she was past knowing what those around her were doing, old Mrs. Carhayes sent for her son, and in obedience to her request, and Ethel's command, but with no hope in his own heart, he came.

* * * *

It may be remembered that Arthur called Ethel out of the room when he received his mother's message ; and while she was away, Hugo had time to fret himself considerably about the familiarity he had noticed, which might be fraternal, but which was a maddening thing for a man to witness who regarded Ethel warmly, as he did. He determined to be very prudent and cautious—to watch the girl narrowly for a long time, to get at her real sentiments and opinions regarding different social questions, to “learn” her, in fact, before he in any way committed his happiness to her keeping.

It was so easy for him to determine to do all these things while Ethel was out of the room !

But when she came back, “Poor wisdom's chance against a glance” was not a specially strong one. She had been a good deal touched by Arthur's agitation

about the intelligence he had received. She had been a good deal thrilled by his parting manner. "Whatever comes, Ethel," he said, "I shall always think much of you."

"And I of you," she said, courageously.

Then he had stooped down and kissed her hand, as a man does kiss the hand of a woman who has been more to him than others, yet not the dearest.

"Perhaps there will be a wedding-ring on it, Ethel, when next I hold it."

"Perhaps there will, but it shall be given to you in just as friendly a way as it is now. I promise you that."

Then he went away; and she returned to Hugo Grey, with that wonderful soft glow about her that betrays the working of some special vein of tenderness in the heart.

"Mr. Carhayes has just heard of the birth of a son and heir," she began, hurriedly; "you will excuse his not coming in to say good-bye, I am sure, under the circumstances; he starts at once for home."

She spoke in a subdued, agitated tone, and Hugo forgot all the grandly prudent resolutions he had formed while she was out of the room. He got up and came close to her chair, and his honest young face was working with emotion.

"Miss Huntingdon, will you forgive me? I have no right, I know, to say it; but my deep interest in you—I mean in all that concerns you—must be my excuse. Is it true that Mr. Carhayes and his wife are separated?"

"There has been an unhappy estrangement, but now I hope and believe they will understand one another better, and be reunited," she said, gravely.

"Was the fault hers or his?"

"His, I should think, if there be any 'fault.' I should say 'mistake' was the better word."

Her hands were loosely clasped and lying on her lap, and her lustrous, mobile face was uplifted to his. Suddenly he bent one knee on the footstool before her, and, taking both her hands in his, he asked—

"Ethel, will you be my wife? Don't say it is too abrupt of me. You know I have loved you from the first."

"Yes, I will be your wife, though I will be honest enough to tell you that I haven't loved you from the first; but I love you now, Hugo. And how furious your sister will be!" she wound up, with a bright burst of laughter that enchained her lover still more firmly, and for a few minutes caused him to forget Arthur Carhayes and his uncomfortable doubts about the fraternal footing he was on with Ethel.

After a time—after one of those blissful interludes

when two human beings satisfy one another so completely, that they forget that another exists on the face of the earth (a state of mind which frequently occurs during the first three days of an engagement)—Ethel unluckily reverted to the *bête noire*.

“Arthur Carhayes said just now that the next time he kissed my hand there might perhaps be a wedding-ring on it.”

“Do you mean to say you allowed him to kiss your hand?” The gay, good-humoured young lover scowled a very unmistakable scowl as he asked this, and Ethel’s spirit rose.

“Yes, I did; he is a dear old friend, dear as a brother to me. I liked him when he was the happiest husband in the world, when my friendship was of no value to him; since he has been an unhappy man, my friendship has been of value to him—it has saved him from making a fool of himself, as he was inclined to do in his misery. No wonder I like him. I mean to make you like him too.”

“My darling, no doubt I shall like him, but I don’t mean him to kiss your hand any more.”

“Look here, Hugo; it is better that we should come to a fair understanding. If you haven’t sufficient trust in me to let my friendship for Arthur Carhayes remain as it is now, you ought not to want

me to be your wife. I tell you fairly I like him ; my marriage with you won't make me like him less. I should be ashamed of myself if I did now what it would be wrong to do then."

CHAPTER XII.



“WHY have you come?”

These were the first words Stella addressed to her husband, and he echoed them in bitter mocking tones.

“Why indeed! since you can ask me such a question. Is there any need to interrogate a man why he comes to see his first-born?”

“But why yet?” she urged. “You can’t teach him to hate me at present; he will be mine until he is seven years old.”

“So,” the poor fellow thought, “there is no wish for a reconciliation in her mind!” And with this thought there came a wild desire into his heart to be at peace with his wife once more. She looked so fragile and so pure; suffering had spiritualised her. What if Stella should die? The idea cut him like a sword, and he cried out in his pain.

“My wife, forgive me!” he groaned. It had been so far from his original design to attempt to

"make it up," as children say, with Stella, that now when he uttered the words he felt as though they were being forced out of him by some power that was stronger than his own will. Then he almost shivered at his temerity in daring to ask her for forgiveness. For, looking at her now, he knew—he saw as in a mirror—how grossly he had wronged her. He had covered his face with his hands when speaking those four words, "My wife, forgive me!" and now he stood there, each second seeming like an hour, waiting for her verdict. Would she never speak? Had she quite hardened her heart against him who had been her dear friend, at least, before he had been her cruel husband. Would she never speak?

His horror of suspense was broken by a hand, light and fluttering as a bird's wing, laid upon his own, and he looked up to meet Stella's softened tender gaze, and to hear her say—

"We must forgive each other, Arthur. I never thought I should be able to say this. I fancied I could die first; but you have broken me down by gentleness, and—how happy we may be after all! I can't say much now, but when I am stronger we must clear up everything, or the mists may arise again."

"Will you love me at last, Stella?"

He saw the pale face flush.

"You are far more to me now, Arthur; you are

the father of my child." And with this he strove to be content.

She was not a woman to vow and swear and perjure herself. According to her own idea, she did not "love" her husband. She liked him and admired him, and was proud of his brilliant beauty and equally brilliant abilities; but she knew what love was, and she could not say that she loved him.

He was compelled to be content. It was hard, bitterly hard, but no human power could alter the fact. That old romance either absorbed her to the exclusion of all other love, or, like a rank and poisonous weed, it had killed within her all power of loving in the pure and natural way. But he dared not probe too deeply yet. In time he knew that she would bravely mention Rupert Lyon's name, and force him to tell her how his suspicion had arisen. In the meantime he had better leave her nothing to find out about Ethel.

So, after a few days, when Stella was better, and able to sit up and hold the boy, the little peacemaker, in her arms, he began.

"How delighted Ethel Huntingdon will be when she hears how happy we are together again, Stella! She prophesied it."

Stella was not an angel. No one would have ventured to call her one, had he or she seen the rush of

colour that suffused her face, or heard the quick sharp ring of her words—

“Did she really! May I ask was she your *confidante* in all things respecting me?”

“She only knew of our separation and my misery.”

“And she comforted you?”

It was Arthur's turn to flush now.

“No one could do that but yourself, Stella; still, Ethel was a kind, good little friend to me.”

“Atrocious little flirt!” Stella said, indignantly. “I was unhappy too, Arthur; but it never occurred to me to seek a confidant and consoler of the opposite sex. I bore my sorrow alone.”

He hardly knew how to go on after this. In justice to Ethel, he knew he ought to impress his wife with a good opinion of the girl. But how was he to do this, and to be perfectly truthful at the same time? Stella would not be likely to think the better of any young lady from whom he had asked entire and unreserved friendship. He would make no mention, therefore of that part of the business. This is what his resolution of “making a clean breast of it” was coming to.

“I did not seek her as a woman,” he began, deprecatingly; “I sought her as a fellow-writer. I wish to Heaven now we hadn't done that book together; it doesn't go well.”

The latter part of his speech was meant as a concession. It would, he rightly judged, be pleasant to Stella to hear it—though it was not quite true, for the book was in a second edition.

“I don’t wonder at it,” Stella said, calmly. “‘Compensation’ struck me as being regular twaddle—parts of it. You must excuse me saying so; of course I don’t know which part of it was her work, and which was yours.”

Perhaps it would be better not to inform her on the subject more fully. Accordingly he made some discursive remarks on the difficulties attendant on joint authorship, and said no more about Ethel for that day.

Unquestionably perfect confidence was not yet restored between these two. How hardly Stella sought to establish it no one knew but herself. But she had two powers opposed to her—Arthur’s reserve about some portions of his life at the Huntingdons’, and her own unconquerable jealousy of Ethel. It was in vain that she endeavoured to think well of Miss Huntingdon.

“How can I think well of a girl who tried to inveigle the affections of a married man—whatever that man’s opinion of his own wife might have been at the time?” she would say to herself. “I shall never think of her as of a woman

who has a claim to my respect. She was reckless outwardly—and probably the outward was the fairest side.”

The truth is to be found in this nutshell. Stella had entirely forgiven Arthur from the bottom of her heart for the wrong he had done her in his thoughts, and for his desertion of her; but she could not forgive him for having, as she believed, “gone to another woman in his trouble;” and in this she was like the majority of her sex. “Every lady would be queen for life,” we are told by one whose wisdom was as the wisdom of Solomon in all that appertains to the characters of women.

After the violent emotions and the social earthquakes that had been shattering their systems of late, life seemed suddenly to grow very quiet and still with the Carhayeses. They stayed on at the old Grange until Stella was strong and able to travel comfortably, and then they went back to Carhayes Place, carrying with them the infant heir.

Though she was going back in triumph, so to say, the mere fact of going back was unpleasant to Stella. She did not attempt to stultify her faculties, and try to believe that people had not talked about her a great deal. Talked about her! She knew that, thanks to the woefully short-sighted policy her husband had followed, she had been cast from her pedestal in such

a way that it was impossible but that she should be much bruised and mangled in public estimation.

"Everybody will know that it was not an ordinary kind of quarrel that parted us, Arthur," she said, quite suddenly, when their journey was nearly finished, and they were on the borders of their own home. "You must not expect to see me held quite as I was before."

He felt furious with the world, with himself, with everybody, when she said this, for unfortunately he felt it to be the truth. He had cast her down before the multitude. Because it had pleased him now to pick her up and set her up aloft, could he—in the name of common sense, how could he?—expect them to forget her overthrow and look upon her as they had looked upon her before?

"Humpty Dumpty has had a great fall," she said, trying to speak lightly; "and not all the king's horses nor all the king's men can ever set her up quite as she was before; but we must bear it bravely. If I see you wincing, you will try my courage hardly."

"Oh, Stella, how can you forgive me!"

"I have done it; we won't go over that old subject again. I want to talk about the future—the future in which people must learn, like a new lesson, that my fame is as fair as ever. They must learn it for the sake of our boy."

"How I, by my imprudence, have complicated our lives!" he muttered.

"Let us be thankful that as you were under such a bad influence—such a bad attractive influence—while we were apart, that you didn't complicate them still more."

"I wish I could teach you to be just to Ethel."

"I am just to her—more than just, I fancy; but I shall never think well of her. Why does she not take unmarried men in her toils? I am very lenient to girls with whom an honourable marriage is an object, but I have no words strong enough in their contempt for those who pour sweet poison into a married man's ear to make him distrust his wife."

She spoke vehemently, and he, knowing how weak he had been about Ethel, because she had been near him, felt as if he were in a maze, and had lost the clue by which he was to get himself out of it again.

"I despair of making you think well of Ethel Huntingdon," he began, pleadingly. "How unconsciously I have wronged her, and, Heaven knows, how undesignedly, if I have led you to think that she was the cause of our most unhappy misunderstanding." Then he paused, and made up his mind to a colossal concession—one that he thought ought to win a most lenient judgment from Stella concerning all things.

"There is one person we have not spoken of yet,

Stella. I want to tell you, my darling, that I shall be a happier man when Rupert Lyon and I have clasped hands in friendship again."

Dead silence.

"Stella, are you not glad to hear me say this?"

A slight effort to speak on her part, but no words resulting from that effort.

"I said it to please you," he confessed, injudiciously.

Then she burst out.

"I know that, Arthur; and that is why I don't value the saying. 'Don't value it!' why, I would much rather that you had never said it; you say so many things to please me now—not because you feel them."

"But I do feel this about Rupert."

"Pray don't speak of him; he has quite gone out of our lives. Why should we harass ourselves and each other by mentioning his name?"

"I will not again, dear." Then in a lower tone, "Let me say welcome back, my own sweet wife, to Carhayes Place, under happier auspices than any that we have hitherto known. We have been tried in the fire."

"It was of your own lighting," she thought, but she said nothing. She only smiled. Stella was learning that lesson of reticence which the being mis-

understood and maligned most surely teaches sooner or later.

There were nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles about her, the "lady of the land," amongst her own household. She knew, she realised it at once, in an hour or two after her return. There was a certain sort of curiosity about the heir, a certain way of speculating about whose features he wore. One of those privileged social torments, an old family servant, suggested that she supposed "Master Arthur favoured his mamma's race, for he wasn't in the least like any Carhayes she had ever seen." Another said, "Well, ladies always had their fancies at such times, but 'twas strange for a real Carhayes to be born promiscuously; 'twas almost enough to give the poor child the feeling that he wasn't of the old blood."

These remarks were not pleasant to listen to, even from servants, reported to her as they were by the nurse, who was a stranger to the clan and missed the point of many of the clannish sayings, and so came to her mistress to have them elucidated. But Stella's prophetic soul warned her that there was worse to follow.

During the months that had elapsed since the family were at the "Place," the old vicar of Carhayes had died, and a canon of a cathedral had been in-

ducted in the living in his stead. Now one must have lived in the blessed, rarefied atmosphere of a cathedral town to understand fully all the greatness and the glory of the exalted ones who form, as it were, the staff of a bishop. "As cowslip unto oxlip is, as water unto wine," so are the other clergy to them.

In addition to his being a canon of a cathedral, he had flung a halo around himself by marrying one of the daughters of his bishop, who was blessed with nine of them. This was a judicious sacrifice of taste and inclination on his part, and well deserved the reward of the first piece of patronage that fell to that bishop's hand.

The lady was no slight test of a man's devotion to his own interests. She was five or six and twenty, perhaps. The word "perhaps" is used, because she belonged to the order the question of whose age never arises. Not that she blandished men out of all thoughts respecting it. She never blandished; she smiled amiably on any number of unmarried curates, but the majority of them had turned aside from her and from her sisters.

Her face was thin, and her features and her chin were cut away from under her nose like a bird's. One pitied her for her plainness, until one learnt that it was accepted in the family as a species of good

looks. Her figure was spare, and her bust seemed to have got on to her back in some unaccountable way. Altogether she was not an attractive woman, personally—and her manner suited her person to perfection.

But she was a bishop's daughter and the wife of the Vicar of Carhayes. As the living was a good one, she was a power in the land, and she came to her kingdom while Mrs. Carhayes was away in disgrace.

"The Carhayes people have come home in triumph, Tom," she said to her husband, a morning or two after that return of Stella's which has been described, and about which not any signs of triumph could be detected. And Tom tried to give the initiative, and failed.

"We must call—very soon."

"Indeed, I shall not," Mrs. Wellington replied, shortly. "There is not the least occasion for it; and you had better let it be clearly understood that you only call as the priest."

Mr. Wellington was a little man with a handsome seraphic face, and very fine blue eyes, that caused him to look much more earnest and thoughtful than he was, by reason of the length of their thick black lashes. He was a gentleman too, courteous in manners and tone. His wife on the contrary avowed

herself to be "original," and "unlike other people," which happily she was.

"I can hardly go in to the Carhayeses announcing myself in the way you propose, and requesting them to ignore me socially, can I?" he asked, laughing.

"Requesting them to ignore you socially! I should think not: but you must give that woman to understand that we ignore her socially."

"My dear Carry, 'that woman' is a lady of high birth and great beauty. I have heard of her as one of the most attractive women of her day. Why do you want me to insult her?"

"Tom is a fool," his wife thought, "but I didn't know he was such a fool as to oppose me." Aloud she said—

"If you in any way compromise me into associating with that woman, I shall appeal to my father, and you will then hear his views on the subject."

The Reverend Tom made one gallant but altogether ineffectual struggle for liberty—one feeble little effort against being utterly swept away before the whirlwind of his wife's will. He knew—none better—that his gentle Carry had a tongue that could shoot out sharp words. In her own family she had always been accepted as a privileged person, free to utter any number of "home truths" tipped with gall.

"I don't want your father to teach me views as to

my own parishioners. I have very settled ones concerning them already."

"You have—and very absurd ones, let me tell you. And while we are on the subject, I may as well add that it is still more absurd of you to attempt to set up your judgment in opposition to my father's, or to mine, as far as that goes."

"Really, Carry, that is hardly the tone for you to take with me, I think."

"I haven't been accustomed to consider what people think about the tone I take, so long as I know it to be a proper and sensible one," the lady said, imperiously; and her husband looked at her, and thought how badly the features and the form of his lawful spouse harmonized with the imperious. Her curves all went the wrong way.

"But do you think this a proper and sensible tone to take about a person of whom you know no harm?"

"She is a dreadfully bad woman, I believe," Mrs. Wellington said, jauntily. "And she wouldn't in the least comprehend what my position was before I married, if I ambled off to do homage to her, now she has come back after such glaring conduct. She might try to patronize me, and I should like to see her do that!"

Mr. Wellington went on signing the meat tickets for which a number of old women were waiting in

the butler's pantry, and sagaciously said no more on the obnoxious subject of Mrs. Carhayes. But in semi-unconscious deference to his wife's opinions, he deferred calling on the "family at the Place" of whose return all the parish were talking.

"Carry has such excellent sense, she will relent in time, when she knows how much I wish it." He tried to console himself with this reflection—after the manner of men who fool with facts.

When a few more days had passed over his estimable and good-looking head, and still Carry gave no sign of relenting, he meekly accepted the situation, and went over to Carhayes Place alone.

"In that little man's nicely warbled words, I heard the first breath of the storm that is going to burst over me, Arthur."

Mrs. Carhayes said this as soon as their visitor had departed, standing up facing her husband, and feeling for him—feeling for the agony his own folly was going to cause him far more acutely than she did for herself.

"What do you mean, dear?" He could not emulate her courage—he could not look her in the face.

"Don't you know, Arthur? You have restored me to my place in your confidence, but not in these people's. Humpty Dumpty has had a great fall, and

not all the king's horses, &c., &c. Mr. Wellington, the man whose mission here is to the sick, and the sinning, and the sorrowful, has a wife, and that wife won't call on me."

"I will——" he was beginning, but she stopped him with an impatient

"Hush! you will—you can do nothing. Time only can be my avenger."

"I will not keep you here to be continually stung. I will let this place, and take you abroad."

"For them to feel that we cared for their petty piques? No! for the boy's sake, he must be kept to the fore. People are capable of thinking, if we go away, that he will die, and that we shall steal another heir."

CHAPTER XIII.

"You have come here again then? You are a foolish moth, for I shall surely scorch you."

These words, half timidly, half playfully, Ethel Huntingdon addressed to Mr. Hugo the first time that young gentleman appeared before her after their quarrel and parting about Arthur Carhayes. He had come to her in a fit of contrition for what he was ready now to stigmatise as "his rudeness and his folly." But his intentions as to the renewal of his proposals were vague. For Miss Ethel, in the course of that conflict between their wills, had developed an amount of fire and determination that was pretty to look at, but that might be unpleasant in every-day domestic life.

Moreover, his sister, Mrs. Arden, had talked at him and to him without ceasing for six days. She had, on his return from that luckless visit to the Huntingdon Tower, pounced upon him, and asked him outright whether or not he was engaged. And

he had been glad at the moment, while his anger against Ethel was hot, to say "No." But day after day his wrath had grown cooler, and he had yearned more and more for a sight of the glowing radiant face that his sister was so fond of speaking of as sensuous and vulgar. And so at last he had gone over, and sought her again, quite meaning to ask her to be friendly with him—nothing more!

To his surprise she greeted him with this remark—

"You have come again then? You are a foolish moth, for I shall surely scorch you."

All his prudent resolutions vanished. At once she again became the one woman in the world worth winning. He was a little fascinated, too, by the cool way in which she showed her belief in its being his intention to try to win her again; but he resolved to try not to go abruptly to work.

"Yes, I have fluttered back, quite ready to be scorched. It will be pleasanter than being out in the cold, as I have been for the last six days."

"Is it six days? Really it doesn't seem so long. Six days since poor Arthur Carhayes went away to his sick wife!"

"How is Mrs. Carhayes? I suppose you have heard." This was said very stiffly, but Miss Huntingdon was thinking of something else, and did not notice the stiffness.

"Since you were here last I have got a dear little boat, and two or three times I have pulled myself ever so far up the river; but your great big arms could pull it ever so much farther. Shall we go? I have nothing to do."

"And I have nothing to do but your pleasure," he replied, gallantly; and then he wished he knew whether he was engaged to this girl or not. If he asked her now, 'perhaps she might say "No," and that would stop the boating. It would be better to wait.

They walked down to the river, and found the little boat moored under a big oak tree; and he was pleased to see traces of Ethel's daintiness in all that appertained to her new possession—pleased with, though he laughed at it.

"The water will soon take the shine off your gorgeous purple velvet cushions," he began.

"But they are so lovely to look at before the shine is taken off," she pleaded; "and I had them before. It is no new expense."

"It is not fitting that the question of expense should ever occur to you," he answered warmly; "you ought to have everything bright and beautiful that the world holds; they are yours by right of your own bright beauty."

She laughed.

"Tradesmen, unluckily for me, don't hold the same views about it as you do. When I go into a shop full of pretty things, I am like what my father is about his prize pigs and bullocks—I want them. I'm like the little boy who, after glueing his nose for a long time to the window of a confectioner's shop, goes in and asks—

'That jolly cake, so large and nice,
If you please, sir, what's the price?'
'Guineas two.' 'Oh, then I'm done.
What's the other?' 'Guinea one.'
'That little one, I think I'll try.'
'Half-a-guinea.' 'Oh, my eye!
If you please, a penny bun.'

And I am contented with my penny bun."

"I hope you are not like that small philosopher in all things in life. I hope, in the great stakes, you won't eventually be contented with a penny bun."

They were in the boat by this time, gliding lazily and leisurely down the stream; she lounging prettily in one end, steering, he opposite to her, occasionally pulling a few strokes with just sufficient energy to keep them going.

"What do you call the 'great stakes?'" she asked, with pretty malice.

"The matrimonial stakes are the greatest proverbially, are they not?" He pulled with a little

more vigour, and wondered whether she had quite forgotten all that had passed before they quarrelled the other day—whether she had quite forgotten it, or whether she was going to quite ignore it.

“ Ah ! you see I have never put into that lottery ; I have not had my chance of drawing the two guinea cake yet. If I ever do, and lose it, true to my principles, I shall put up with the penny bun ; but I shall try for the big cake first.”

He was in a difficulty. If she had not spoken that last sentence, his path would have been easy. He could have said, “ Here is the penny bun, ready for your acceptance.” But after this distinct avowal from her that she would “ try for the big cake first,” it would have the sound of his taking it for granted that he was the two-guinea cake, and that he knew she thought him it, if he asked her to take him now.

So he pulled away with an increase of vigour, and Ethel watched him with laughing eyes, and knew that, before they pulled home again, he would be hers again, to have and to hold as long as she pleased. But she was quite satisfied at present with marking the just tribute to her many excellencies which was portrayed in his current manner. When he had fallen into a languid stroke again, and become sufficiently at his ease to look at her, she drifted into easy conversation.

"You see what I have been doing since you were over with me last—getting my boat in order; what have you been doing?"

"Staying at home and moping."

"Tell me how you mope."

"I hate my kind and don't eat my dinner."

"Ah! I do mine differently. I hate my kind, and do eat my dinner."

"I don't think I could do the first if I had dined well," he laughed.

"I could even eat wedding cake and loathe the confectioner, for instance; so entirely can I separate cause and effect. But you must be a very easy person to subdue; when you were moping, why didn't your sister get you something you liked, and push it into your den."

"My sister and I had quarrelled."

"And after quarrelling you stayed on in her house and moped! How very thick-skinned of you!"

"We didn't exactly quarrel, but she used to annoy me by saying disagreeable things."

"What about?" Ethel asked firmly.

"About—oh! about all sorts of things."

"Tell me what your sister said." He shook his head.

"Why doesn't she like me?" Ethel said, with

apparent irrelevance. "It is so funny of her to hate a fellow-creature who hasn't crossed her at all."

"Why will you think my sister hates you?—how could any one belonging to me do it?"

"But you know she does, and you know that it is about me she has been worrying you. Why didn't you tell her that I am nothing to you—but a friend with whom you may occasionally go boating; why didn't you?"

"Because from the bottom of my heart I hope that you will be so much more, Ethel."

And then he put his sculls down, and rose up, to their dreadful danger—for the boat, selected by a lady, was a fragile affair, that wobbled whenever any one moved—and made his way to that empress sitting there on the imperial purple, and said—

"Call me anything—penny bun or two-guinea cake; only take me, and be satisfied with me, Ethel. My love, is it any wonder that I moped away from you?"

"Oh, don't tumble about; please get back on your own seat till you can pull into the bank. Didn't I warn you the instant I saw you this morning? You are scorched awfully, you know, and I am not altered a bit since we parted the other day."

"I am sure you will always be reasonable," he said, with effusion, when he had pulled in under the

bank, according to her directions, and the situation was safe enough for her to admit of his nearer approach.

"That is just what I am not a bit sure of myself, Hugo dear," she answered, frankly. "Perhaps you will think it unreasonable of me to say that, now that I have promised to be your wife, your sister must leave off treating me as if I were the scum of the earth."

"My sister is a goose."

"I think she is. I mean, I think that very probably she is; but I won't be gabbled about by her. All these days that you have been away I knew you would come back—at least I thought you would, Hugo"—this with infinite softness—"if you loved me as I loved you, and I have been making up my mind what we ought to do. You ought not to marry me if you will lose your family by doing so, and I certainly ought not to marry into a family that will make me lose my own self-respect."

"What can I do, dear? My sister is jealous of you." That is the easier method of accounting for feminine hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; therefore it is the method most frequently adopted by men when they are in a dilemma between a pair of fair antagonists.

"Then teach her that she needn't be, dear Hugo,"

Ethel said, giving him one of her most magnificent looks. And of course Hugo promised foolishly to do it.

They spent several sunny hours in the boat, and when they landed on their return home, the name of Mr. Carhayes had not been mentioned. Ethel was not a girl to avoid anything, however; and so, as they sauntered home, she said—

“I shall write and tell Arthur Carhayes my good news to-morrow.”

“Shall I?—may I write and tell him, dear?”

“No, certainly not. To be quite candid, he wouldn’t relish it half as much from you as from me; it is in the bond, you must understand, that the relations between Arthur Carhayes and me are not to be altered.”

She spoke so cheerily and openly, that he was obliged to say that he did understand that it was in the bond. And then Ethel went on to deliver a panegyric on Arthur, it not having entered into her mind as yet to fear that he would be the one to give up that friendship for which she was ready to forfeit so much.

“Now mind,” she said to Hugo, when yawns from the Baronet and eleven strokes from the clock warned him that he ought to return to the clerical roof that was sheltering him—“now mind, Hugo; I only want your sister to admit that she has no reason and no

right to be other than civil to me. Don't try to make her intimate or friendly, or any of that folly."

"No, I won't," he promised, glibly.

"You may do as you like about telling her that we are engaged, but perhaps it would be just as well that you told her yourself—better that you should do it than that she should hear it from some outsider, eh?"

"I shall proclaim it from the house-tops [to-morrow, in order that you may be fettered by the announcement, and have no chance of escape," he said, vauntingly.

"Nothing fetters me but my own conscience," she said, carelessly.

And then Hugo rode home warm from the tender leave-taking, and found his sister sitting up for him, like a virtuous icicle.

The drawing-room at the Rectory was grim in aspect in the sunniest weather, but to-night, under the influence of a martyred mistress and a gone-out fire, it nearly chilled him to death.

"Gracie, I am so sorry that you should have waited up," he began, apologetically; "and without a fire too. My dear girl——"

"You couldn't suppose that I would allow the servants to sit up, not knowing at what hour you might ne, Hugo? I have some sense of moral and social

responsibility. Have you been at a Volunteer dinner or anything of that kind? For I know of no respectable private gathering to-night that could possibly have detained you."

"No," he said, boldly; "I have been to the Huntingdons'."

"Indeed!" The accents were so freezing that the room grew several degrees colder, and so did his hopes of her proving amenable to good sense and his wishes. But he was a loving brother, though he had called her a goose in his anger; and so now he said, coaxingly, putting his arms round her—

"Gracie dear, I won't tell you something to-night that's very near to my heart, because you are tired and sleepy, and wouldn't give me all the sympathy that you will to-morrow."

"I can guess what your news is, Hugo, when I hear that you have been to the Huntingdons'; naturally, I conclude that girl has succeeded in catching you."

"Don't speak of her in that way, Gracie; she has promised to be my wife. Will you treat her as a sister for my sake?"

"Such a marriage would have broken dear mamma's heart," Mrs. Arden cried, dissolving into savage tears. "The fast daughter of a broken-down bankrupt, who has thrown herself at your head!"

"Don't talk such utter trash." He was getting angry, and did not stay to choose his words carefully. "I tell you this fairly, Gracie, if you don't think it worth while to be civil to Ethel, you will never see me in your house again. The only thing you can do for me—the first thing I ever asked you to do for me—you refuse."

This was a hard hit; for Hugo had been a most generous brother to her, and, as he said, she had never yet had an opportunity of doing him a service in return. She remembered that she had many children, and that her brother was very rich; and remembering this, she thought it well to say that they "had better go to bed now—to sleep, if possible—and talk it over in the morning."

The result of talking it over in the morning was, that Mrs. Arden, after infusing a number of doubts into her brother's mind as to the perfect integrity of the girl he was in love with, advertised herself as ready to call upon and receive that sinner.

Bonnie Ethel, sitting in her study, happy in her work, happy in her love, heard the chariot wheels approaching, and, so to say, girded up her loins for the encounter. Hugo had advised her in a note of the honour advancing upon her. He had thought it better not to "talk it over" with his betrothed, lest his betrothed in her shrewdness should detect that the

compliment had been wrung out of Mrs. Arden. Accordingly, he wrote simply—

“My dearest Ethel,—Gracie is going to do the pretty to you to-morrow; she shall do it by herself, and I will be with you afterwards.—Your own,

“HUGO.”

“My own Hugo has wrought a miracle,” Ethel laughed.

And then she sat down to her work—to her dear, delightful work, that banished all thoughts of social difficulties and disagreeables, and was very happy.

Mrs. Arden had carefully seated herself in that corner of the drawing-room whence every other portion of the room looked most unprepossessing. She had turned her back on the flowers, she averted her eyes from the books and pictures, and studiously fixed them on the floor, whereon she saw dust!

It was a dark, polished floor, and, never having tried to keep one up to a pitch of polished perfection herself, she was bitterly down in her mind on the shortcomings of both mistress and housemaid in that establishment, for their sin in having left a cloudy film of dust over the surface, which the sun was showing up strongly.

"A nice creature to make the mistress of a gentleman's house!" she thought, tossing her fair short-nosed face in the air. "All these wretched pagan images about, too! Why couldn't Hugo have married a Christian at least?" And Mrs. Arden glowered at the poor Venus of Milo, and thought her mutilated stumps a just punishment for her general appearance.

Presently Ethel came in—very "presently;" for Ethel was not of that unrighteous band who keep their visitors waiting in grim suspense while they (the unrighteous band) proceed to beautify themselves according to their lights. Ethel came in, radiant and gorgeous in her glowing beauty and her perfect self-possession, and Mrs. Arden rose up in a suppressed spasm of admiration—such unwilling admiration, too.

"You can guess my mission, Miss Huntingdon;" and her voice was as the voice of a mourner at a funeral.

"I suppose I can," Ethel said, cheerfully. "Won't you face the flowers? They are prettier to look at than the cobweb suspended like a 'drop-scene' that you are looking at now. A good idea, too, for a drop-scene," she continued, meditatively—"one could see so well all that went on behind;" and she looked interrogatively at Mrs. Arden.

That lady buckled on her armour on the spot.

"I know nothing about such things; we of course

were always carefully kept by the gentlemen of our family from hearing of them. I hope Hugo has not been forgetting himself and talking to you of them ; but he is very young."

This was said pityingly, as if Hugo were two and a half years old, and had been suspected of spilling his sop.

"On the contrary," Ethel rejoined, putting her head well back against the back of her chair, and balancing it there comfortably, "I talk to him about such things. I love them ; don't you ?"

"Good gracious, no !" Mrs. Arden cried out shrilly. "But really this is not what I came to say. My brother has told me, Miss Huntingdon, that you have promised to take up the burden of life with——"

"I hope it won't be a burden," Ethel interrupted, shrugging her shoulders. "Hugo swears it shall all be flowery lawns and verdant turf ; but whatever it is, Mrs. Arden, I hope your brother and I won't be bad companions on the way."

"I was going to congratulate you," Mrs. Arden began, stiffly.

"Were you ? It didn't sound like a very congratulatory beginning ; all that about the burden of life," Ethel said, laughing ; "but," she added, in a sudden burst of that "better self" which we are all of us subject to, "I do thank you for coming to be kind."

Ethel had gone nearer to her guest, and now stood holding out her slim hand, and looking far prettier than Mrs. Arden desired to see any girl look whom she did not like.

"As to being kind," she said, taking the slim hand, and feebly holding it for a moment or two,—“as to being ‘kind,’ I don’t know about that. I simply do my duty.”

“Your duty!” Ethel’s face was on fire. “Have you come here”—her voice was indescribably soft and clear as she said it—“have you come here to-day as a matter of ‘duty’ only? Well, why should you not, though? If I was weak enough to think just at first that you meant it kindly, that weakness is past.”

“Really!” said Mrs. Arden, offended, and still not daring to offend her brother, as she would past all redemption if she quarrelled with Ethel now, “really! well, call it duty or pleasure, or what we will, we all mean the same thing.”

“Do we?” Ethel said, abstractedly. “I am not sure—I dare say we do—but we so seldom know what we mean.”

“And now as I have been to see you, you must come and see me,” Mrs. Arden simpered. “Hugo is most anxious—would you come and stay—”

“Thank you: I can’t leave my father,” Ethel said, firmly, and Mrs. Arden began to fear that Hugo would

hear that she (Grace) had "broken the word of promise to the heart, though she had kept it to the ear."

"Oh, but do!—do!" she pleaded anxiously: "Hugo will be so—I don't know what."

"I will visit you with pleasure"—Ethel had a stiff struggle to get out that sentence, but she did not want to be the one to take up arms.

"Then I shall hope to see you for a day at least," Mrs. Arden said impressively, rising at the same time. "You see a sister's feelings are always—must be—that is—guided by——"

"Circumstances; yes, I see," Ethel laughed. And the "memory of that laugh rankled" in Mrs. Arden's mind two days after, when Ethel went to pay her promised visit.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is never a very pleasant feeling, that which we experience when we go to a strange house with the certainty before us of having a very dubious reception. How vainly we strive to despise the people who will of a surety accord us this reception! How easily we hate them! How absurdly we endow them with a power they do not possess of depreciating our value! How utterly insignificant we feel as we wobble up their avenue if on foot, or descend at their threshold if we have arrived in a carriage! We have all, on some unlucky day or other of our lives, gone, against the grain, to the house of some person who had just enough power over us to annoy; and so to a certain degree we can all sympathise with poor Ethel Huntingdon when at last the Fates ordained that she should spend a day in the Ardens' domestic circle.

"I don't want to go," she had said stoutly to Hugo, when she first received his sister's invitation—"I don't want to go, and she doesn't want to have me for

a day; why won't you be satisfied with the civility of a call? I am."

"It is much better that Gracie and you should settle your horses together before we are married." He said it in a sort of careless way, as if he didn't strongly feel the necessity after all, and Ethel felt nettled.

"Do you mean better for Gracie or for me?" she asked coolly.

"For—oh! for you I meant, dear; I want you to be liked by my people."

"And I hope you want me to like your people." She said it with a careless kind of inflection in her voice, with a careless expression on her face—the face that was held up at an angle that was indicative of indifference utterly unmixed with defiance. And for all this exterior carelessness, what care there was in the girl's heart the while!

The dread feeling, the feeling that is the bane and the curse of so many a married woman's life—namely, that the man to whom she has delivered herself and her dignity is going to undervalue both when he offers them up at the shrine of his own Family Feeling—was upon her.

"Why should she," she asked herself—"why should she, Ethel Huntingdon, brilliant beauty, fascinating woman, popular novelist as she was, bow the

knee for a moment before any plump pretender to social superiority who happened to be the sister of the man she (Ethel) was going to marry?" Still, though she asked herself this question, and answered it entirely to her own satisfaction, she found herself whirled by circumstances to Mrs. Arden's door as a guest.

There was something conventional — "starchy" Ethel called it—and utterly dispiriting in the way in which she was received. She had been asked for a "long day," and specially requested to come early; and unadvisedly she had attended to the request. She had come at twelve—an hour when Mrs. Arden was invisible to the naked eye of chance intruders by reason of being immersed, so to say, in the soup of a parish charity kitchen. There was not the least occasion for the lady's presence. The work of distribution was done by those who understood it, and though she was there, would have been better done if she had not been there at all. She would have displayed far more Christian charity had she stayed quietly at home and given Ethel a warm reception, instead of going to the soup kitchen and snubbing her future sister-in-law by her discourtesy at the same time that she spilled the soup.

But where was Hugo? He at least might have been to the fore; he at least might have endeavoured to atone for his sister's absence by his own presence. But

Hugo left her to get out of the carriage, and walk into the drawing-room, under the auspices of an embryo footman, who beautifully illustrated the song of "The Brook"—"I slip, I slide," &c. He skated on before her in a way that made her unconsciously tread upon Mrs. Arden's thickly carpeted hall as upon ice, and announced her in precisely the same tone as that in which he took his part in the choir.

Hugo rose up from the perusal of letters which had been burdening his mind ever since post-time, as he saw her come in, with an exclamation on his lips of "By Jove!" that expressed impatience, and that, fortunately for the continuance of their friendly relations, Ethel did not hear.

"Have I come the wrong day?" she asked, laughingly, as he came to meet her, with apologies tumbling over each other as they fell from his mouth.

"The wrong day! Ethel dear, let me have a look at you." After kissing her, he held her off admiringly; and Ethel knew that he was scrutinising her to see whether or not she would justify his taste before his own people.

"Well, have I not 'dressed the occasion' properly?"

"Most admirably, as far as my taste is concerned; but I have a couple of old aunts here who will think you a most appalling swell."

"Will they?" Ethel said; and she couldn't help being conscious that she said it nippingly.

"Wretched of Gracie to leave me to receive you in this way," he exclaimed impatiently, looking round the room vaguely for a means of escape from the wretchedness of it; "she'll be in directly, Ethel. She said—she told——"

"Please don't apologise for your sister's absence, Hugo." Ethel spoke very seriously, but her eyes danced with fun. It was rather amusing to see him capering, as it were, in his ornamental fetters. It would have been funnier still if he had not been going to become so very near to her.

Presently the demon of desire for fun vanished, and the real Ethel came in its place.

"Why don't you boldly aver, as I am ready to do, that you don't care tuppence whether your sister is here or not! We don't want her, Hugo."

"Don't say—don't use that expression before my aunts, the Misses Parkham," he besought in an agony.

"And why not?"

"They hate slang."

"And is saying 'I don't care tuppence' slang? If it is, I'll say in future 'I don't care two pennies,' but I must mention some coin in order to make the smallness, the absolute nothingness of my care appre-

cialable. Your sister asked me to come early—to come earlier than this! The shame, if shame there is, of my being here alone with you is hers, not mine.”

How very difficult she was to manage, he felt. How much easier it would have been to deal with some young being who would have been bewildered by his sister’s condescension in inviting her at all! Men think this sort of humility innocence, until a short matrimonial experience teaches them that it is idiocy.

“Would you like to go to your room—I’ll send for Gracie’s maid—wouldn’t you like to go to your room, and take off your hat?” he proposed, rather too earnestly for the proposition to sound like entire consideration for her feelings.

“No, thank you; my hat will do very well there,” and she flung it down on a chair, on which was already reposing Mrs. Arden’s pet piece of wool-work.

Mrs. Arden’s pet piece of wool-work was a pink shepherdess superintending the repast of a sky-blue lamb. The colours were all delicate, and liable to soil speedily. It was Mrs. Arden’s wont to work all things in these colours, and then to endeavour to preserve them by covering them closely with brown holland all the year round. She was remarkably sensitive about her work—specially so about this

work of art in question. Hugo gave an involuntary shudder as he saw Ethel's irreverent hat descend upon it.

"Gracie will imagine the shadow of a shade has fallen on her lamb's tail if she comes in and finds your hat here," he said, picking it up.

"Will she? How fussy she must be! Will you tell me beforehand what I am to eat, drink, and avoid in her house? Oh, I'm too late!" She made a little wry mouth, and feigned a sudden timidity for his amusement as two elderly ladies sailed into the room.

"Evidently the aunts," she thought, as Hugo gave her an imploring glance, and then led her towards them.

"Aunt Eliza, this is Ethel; let me introduce her to you and aunt Jane, and demand your warmest congratulations on——"

"Excuse me, Hugo"—aunt Eliza executed a stately curtsey as she spoke, a curtsey that conveyed her several inches farther away from Miss Huntingdon—"excuse me, Hugo, but I think that would be very premature. We make it a rule never to congratulate young people immediately; we wait to see whether the engagement is a matter of congratulation or not."

"How exceedingly—considerate of you!" Ethel

said dryly; "one rarely meets with such delicacy from strangers."

The Parkham eyes were fixed upon her like needles, in vain endeavour to make out if she meant what she said, or if she was laughing at them. Ethel bore the scrutiny unflinchingly—bore it with a cool resignation to their coldness that almost unconsciously roused them into antagonism.

"Have you seen Mrs. Arden yet?" aunt Jane asked, after a glance round the room in search of the absent hostess.

"No"—Ethel spoke quite cheerfully, and deposited herself at the same moment in a comfortable, low, plump chair, in the prettiest of attitudes—"no; Mrs. Arden asked me to come early, but I suppose she has forgotten the fact, for she is not here to tell me I am welcome."

"Mrs. Arden has duties in the morning"—the aunts spoke simultaneously, in such a way as indisputably proved that they had thought of the speech beforehand. "It is impossible for a clergyman's wife, the mistress of a house, and the mother of a family, to neglect those duties." Aunt Eliza sang the latter sentence as a solo, and Ethel lifted her eyebrows with a look of languid interest in the statement.

"Take me round the garden; Hugo," she said, indicating that he was to hand her her hat; and then

she gave them a smiling nod of "farewell for the present," and passed out through the open window into the garden with her lover.

"I couldn't have stayed a moment longer with them, Hugo; they would stultify all my finer faculties, and leave me unable to cope with Mrs. Arden. What a pleasant day I shall have here, dear!" She spoke in a laughingly confidential tone, but he could not emulate her indifference.

"My people all have such confoundedly old-fashioned notions," he said savagely. "Those old witches are my mother's sisters, and they have no end of money to leave. I have always kept in with them."

"And you are afraid that I shall put you out with them?" Her head went up, and her eyes flashed, and she moved the hand that had been resting so lightly on his arm.

"No, Ethel, no!" He travelled after and recaptured the hand. "I am not 'afraid' of anything connected with you; only I think—I mean I believe we shall find the old ladies very good friends, if you get on with them."

"I'll do my best," she answered in a low voice; "but don't expect impossibilities from me, Hugo."

Just then a servant came from the house with the announcement that "Missus was waiting for them in

"the drawing-room," and Hugo hurried her back in a way that did not seem good to her.

"Your sister can't be so impatient to see me as this haste on your part implies, Hugo," she remonstrated.

"Gracie hates to be kept waiting," he explained hurriedly; "be a dear girl—and meet her advances nicely."

"I'll do my best." That was all she could promise.

Mrs. Arden was sitting down under a flushed sense of offended dignity when Hugo Grey brought his betrothed back into the room.

"That she should have dared to go out before seeing me, just as if she were one of the family, or one that we wanted to have in the family!" she had said angrily to her aunts.

"Oh, she's a very cool young lady," aunt Eliza said, with a little quiver of the head that betrayed the dawning animus.

"A very cool young lady indeed—quite one of the new school," aunt Jane echoed, with a duplicate quiver.

"How I warned Hugo against her!" Mrs. Arden whined. "I am sure if poor mamma only knew of it, aunt Eliza, she would be quite wretched."

"Ah, yes; even in heaven my poor sister would have no peace. But let us hope that she is mercifully spared the knowledge. You remember the last time I was staying here everybody said Ethel Huntingdon would run away with Mr. Carhayes."

"It's my belief that he saved her from that awful fate against her will," Mrs. Arden charitably concluded. And then Ethel came in.

"I could hardly believe you had arrived, Miss Huntingdon, as I didn't find you here," Mrs. Arden began, rising up and speaking with a little agitation, under a sudden fear that Hugo might have heard her last words.

"No! as you were out I amused myself to the best of my ability. The garden is pretty; between the flowers and Hugo I got on very well."

"Hugo, will you take aunt Eliza into luncheon," Mrs. Arden said, bridling her head—"we are rather short of gentlemen to-day, Mr. Arden being busy in the parish."

As this was not specially addressed to Ethel, she made no response, but walked in and seated herself at the table in silence. Presently polite conversation began.

"Are you going to change the library books to-day, Grace, my dear?" aunt Eliza asked.

"Yes, aunt—that is if you have done with the magazines."

"Oh quite, quite, thank you. I really think I shall never look at a magazine again—nothing in them but foolish, flippant fiction. No wonder the young people of the day are what they are, when they mentally feed upon such trash."

Aunt Eliza said her speech beautifully; she had composed it upstairs, and now delivered it with quite the correct emphasis. Ethel shot one laughing glance at Hugo, and to her intense surprise saw that he looked annoyed.

"I think we might find a pleasanter topic than the abuse of novels, considering that Ethel writes them," he unwarily observed.

"Oh, yes! really, I forgot," Mrs. Arden put in with animation. "One never hears of your novels, you know"—what a pleasant truth for a novelist to be told!—"the case is so different with well-known widely-read works. I suppose you'll give up writing them now, won't you?"

Ethel faced her interlocutor calmly.

"I think not; one never can be quite sure. My brain may soften under the influence of so many astoundingly new opinions; but until it does I shall not give up writing them."

"Writing is a great gift," aunt Eliza put in, mag-

nificantly. "If it is used well, it may be a mighty instrument of good; it is, unfortunately, an equally mighty instrument of evil."

No written words can describe the oracular expression of aunt Eliza's martial face as she delivered herself of these dicta.

"I don't at all know what style of stories yours are," Mrs. Arden pursued unflinchingly; "but, as aunt says, a writer holds such a power for good or evil in the hollow of her hand, that the responsibility is, to my mind, too great—far too great for any young woman to assume."

Ethel was beginning to enjoy her visit heartily.

"Where young women get their experience I can't tell," aunt Jane put in with a readiness to catch the cue that did immense credit to her elder sister's training powers. "Unmarried women writing about the obligations and duties of married life, of which they can know nothing—it's startling. As my dear niece observed, Miss Huntingdon, I know absolutely nothing of your works, therefore there is nothing personal in my remarks."

Ethel laughed her wonderful light laugh of mockery and contentment.

"Your remarks certainly don't apply to my writings, Miss Parkham, for they deal chiefly with un-

married life and disregard of private and social obligations."

The glove was thrown down with much outward grace and daring. But poor Ethel had been terribly stung before she did throw it down.

"These women are too appalling," she said to Hugo, as soon as she found herself alone with him. "Why didn't your sister word her invitation differently? She said to me, 'Come to luncheon, and spend a long day;' she should have said, 'Come to luncheon, and be goaded;' for I certainly don't mean to be goaded through a long day."

"They have such horribly old-fashioned notions," he grumbled.

"My dear Hugo, I had an idea that courtesy and common charity were old-fashioned qualities; they were practised at any rate in the New Testament days, but they have evidently gone out at present. Shall I go home now?"

"Ethel, for my sake, stay it out."

"Do you mean stay and dine?"

"Yes; Arden will be in by-and-by, and he's a gentleman, and will make those women behave themselves. But look you, pet; the one barrier against a fair understanding is your partisanship for Carhayes: let them see that he is only a commonplace friend, and they will alter to you."

"What do you want me to say? Do you wish me to stand up and make a declaration to the effect that Mr. Carhayes, being out of my sight, is also out of my mind? Why, I like him, Hugo! I like him a thousand times better than I ever should like women such as your aunts and your sister."

"But it is your seeming to like him so well that has been so commented on. I know of course that there is nothing in it, but you don't know the world as I do, Ethel, and you don't realise how uncharitably you are judged by it, in consequence of the way in which you seem to vaunt your intimacy with Carhayes."

Her head was bent down, and so he did not see her angry flushed face and flashing eyes. He thought that he was talking remarkably well, tolerantly and sensibly on the subject, and that she was being greatly edified. So he went on a trifle more benignly.

"They are sure to have something to say about him by-and-by, and I know that it will please them better if, say—if you give them the impression that you haven't any desire to stand up for him, or to see him again. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"And you will do it, my darling?"

"No, Hugo; not to please a thousand sisters and

aunts. I am not going into bondage to their prejudices. Wherever I am, whoever I am with, I shall always speak well of Arthur Carhayes, and always welcome him warmly when I have the opportunity. I am many things that are bad, but I am not perfidious."

"Why should you run the gauntlet for a fellow like that?"

"Why should I not? He seems to me to be as well worth running the gauntlet of a number of illiberal opinions for, as any man I know; at any rate it is not my custom to ignore a friendship because the friend chances to be absent. It is not my custom yet; what it may be when I have mixed a little longer in the improving society of my own sex, I don't know."

At once, after the manner of warm-hearted youth, Ethel grew unjust when she was stung by abuse of one she liked. "Through evil report and good report he would fight under my colours," she thought, arming herself for the possible battle with Hugo's people with the reflection, "and I won't listen to a word against him without making a protest."

Meanwhile Hugo, having found Ethel impracticable in the matter, resolved to try to cajole the three ladies of his own family into making promises as to silence on the obnoxious subject.

“He is evidently afraid of her committing herself by some speech that we couldn’t look over,” the maiden aunts said to one another; “his poor mother must be shuddering in her grave.”

CHAPTER XV.

RUPERT LYON had been working hard and well during the past year. It was now early in April, and he had prepared four pictures for the chances of rejection or acceptance by the powers of the Royal Academy. They were on view now in his studio in the house close to Manchester, previous to being sent up, and Rupert Lyon had no very strong hopes or fears respecting them, as he stood pulling his moustache, and listening to the various comments that were made upon them by the herd who poured in their hordes and professed to have a rapturous feeling for art.

He had no very strong hopes or fears respecting them, for the simple reason that they were already sold for exorbitant prices, and that he was too well and widely known for his reputation to suffer if they were not hung. Manchester had bought them. And Manchester, in the persons of many millionnaires and many velvet-robed dames, was now in the studio, regarding them with the proud eye of possession.

They were four subject-pictures. One was an apple orchard, with the ripe red fruit hanging temptingly over the heads of a handsome young pair—a man and a girl—who were gathering and shaking it down on to the waving grass. They were a pleasant pair; and it had been a relief to Mrs. Lyon, as she saw the picture grow, that she had been unable to trace any resemblance in the girl's face to the fatal beauty that had banished all powers of loving anything but it from Rupert Lyon's heart.

The second in size was Cleopatra questioning the luckless messenger as to the personal charms of Fulvia—a grand picture, likewise free from the (in Mrs. Lyon's opinion) terrible taint of the faintest shadow of a likeness to Stella Orme.

The third was a *genre* picture—his little daughter Ninon sitting on the top of the piano pointing out a sunbeam to her father.

And the fourth was a woman standing with half-averted face and loosely clasped hands under a magnolia tree—a woman with the beauty that was unfaded, undying in his memory—the beauty of Stella Orme.

These patrons of his were going to lunch with him when they had criticised the pictures to their hearts' content. Mrs. Lyon, in sumptuous violet velvet, was about to achieve another domestic success. Her sallowness

face was more sanguine in hue than usual to-day, by reason of her ardent anticipations of compliments that would be paid to her Palestine soup, her admirable devices in fish, flesh, and fowl, and the general excellence of her cook. She was sitting in the studio now, listening quite complacently to the critical remarks of the friends who were one and all longing to get to the luncheon.

"I declare you can see that Ninon's stockings are silk," one of them said, rapturously. "And the keys of the piano, too! Now, don't they make you long to put your fingers on them? They do me, I declare."

"I hope you will subdue the longing," Rupert put in, carelessly. It was the first time he had spoken. He was waiting, patient and amused, to hear if a single remark relative to the subject, the treatment, the grouping, the expression, the meaning, or the colouring of his pictures would be made. Up to the present moment he had waited in vain. A good deal had been said about the size, the frames, the dress, and the texture of the furniture; that was all.

The same lady who had appraised Ninon's stockings so successfully presently moved on to the "Magnolia Tree," as it was called, and commenced expounding.

"A portrait, I suppose, Mr. Lyon?"

"I have seen the face," he said, abruptly.

"Ah, indeed! yes; a model, I suppose. I re-

cognise the features, having seen them in many of your pictures. Poor creatures. And do you supply the dress?"

"What the—what do you mean?" he asked, gruffly.

"Now, for instance, this girl is dressed quite like a lady; it is impossible that she can get such clothes as you have painted on her, if she is an honest girl; for I am given to understand that models only get a shilling an hour."

Barbara stole a furtive glance at him, and saw that he had no intention of instructing the lady. "Why should he be so fastidious about mentioning her name?" she thought. "She shan't be held so sacred."

"Mr. Lyon had no model for the lady under the magnolia tree; she is a lady; he painted her from memory. It is a Mrs. Carhayes."

"Mrs. Carhayes—the wife of the writer?"

"Yes," Barbara said, suddenly — for Rupert had given her a look of rebuke, and she felt aggrieved; "she was very handsome, my husband thought."

"Her good looks have been her ruin," the lady resumed—"been quite a snare to her. She is separated from her husband. I have heard about her from Mrs. Wellington, the wife of the Vicar of

Carhayes ; her father, the Bishop of —, and my husband are first cousins ; most delightful people."

Rupert had started at the words, but instantly he recollected himself, and turned coolly to his wife.

"Let us go in to luncheon, Barbara," he said, offering his arm to the lady who had just given them so much information that he craved for more. That craving would be gratified, he knew, when wine and oil had opened her heart and loosened her tongue.

Separated from her husband ! Stella, his pure, beautiful ideal, separated from her husband, and spoken of by common tongues as one whose beauty had been a snare to her ! It was too terrible ; and he had been at peace, supinely indifferent, in his ignorance, to any wrong that had been wrought to her. Perhaps he had been the cause, perhaps he had been the means of Stella's downfall. There was torture in this reflection, but there was greater torture in the one that succeeded it. Had she left her husband for another man ?

"Impossible !" he said, aloud, in his sudden agony.

"What's impossible, Mr. Lyon ?" his fair neighbour, who was rapidly growing florid under the combined influence of soup and dry sherry, asked effusively.

"I was thinking that it is impossible that Mrs.

Lyon and you could have been speaking of the same lady. The Mrs. Carhayes I knew is as incapable of leaving her husband as she is of doing anything else wrong or foolish."

"Oh!" (with animation) "she didn't leave him. There are several stories about it. One is that he discovered something very dreadful, and rather than have an open scandal they quietly separated. Dreadful thing to have happened in such an old family; but you see, Mr. Lyon, that is often the case from marrying a pretty face. Fair and frail, fair and frail!"

So she spoke, shaking her head; and in spite of his sorrow Rupert Lyon was able to go on with his luncheon, able to enjoy the unmistakable flavour of his dry sherry, while he listened to words that once would have driven him mad.

After this sad mention of her, it was long before he heard Stella's name or anything about her again. One change his wife marked, and gloated over, and that was that he never again strove to reproduce Stella's splendid beauty on his canvas. He went on painting and prospering, watching Ninon's growth with delighted eyes, and being generally as happy and contented as middle-aged men with no money cares are.

And Stella the while, when she suffered herself to

think of him at all, pictured him as a sorrow-laden, discontented, disappointed man—as women are apt to picture the men the loss of whom has laden them (the women) with sorrow, discontent, and disappointment. She did not sufficiently, or indeed at all, take into account the consolatory power of well-loved and remarkably remunerative work, of a peaceful well-ordered house, of dinners that never gave him dyspepsia, and of a wife that was too good even to disagree with him. With her his life would have been perfect truly; but, as things were ordered, the imperfections of it did not interfere with his personal comfort. And so Time rolled on with healing on his wings for Rupert Lyon.

Day by day at Carhayes Place presented much more tiresome work. Arthur Carhayes was essentially a brilliant creature of sunshine and success. He could not get on without warm social rays being lavished upon him. His pride, of which he had a large supply, could not keep him from pining after his kind. Stella fathomed the pining, and moaned in her soul about it; and still, though she moaned and lamented, she would not go out and humble herself, and strive to do away with the cause for moaning and lamentation.

“They have condemned me unjustly; I will not grovel to them, to make them revoke their unjust

decree. I can live on without these people; all that made life precious was outlived long ago."

So she told herself in her bitter anger against those sister women who had been unable in their charity to believe anything but the very worst of her. And as day by day the effect of this "discipline" which they had forced upon her deepened, there grew up in her heart a feeling, not of anger, not of contempt, but of something that was only a touch less than these, against her husband.

He had been so very strong to take—so very, very weak to hold and guard. "If it were not for my boy, I should pray to die and get out of a world that disgusts me dreadfully," she would permit herself to murmur when alone.

By-and-by, after a long probation, the world began to be good enough to think better of Mrs. Carhayes. Even Mrs. Wellington began to lower her crest on the subject, and avow that if Mrs. Carhayes went on as she was going on now, she (Mrs. Wellington) would notice her.

In his efforts to make up to his wife for some portion of that which his folly had cost her, Arthur Carhayes was ready to sacrifice any one or anything. He had quite given up trying to put Ethel in her true colours before Stella. He had even allowed himself to laugh at her aspirations after literary success, and

declared that her "earlier experiences among a set of cads had given her false ideas altogether of life, and would effectually prevent her ever drawing any character that resembled ever so remotely a gentleman." In fact, he was ready to say anything about the girl that might serve to convince his wife that he had never taken a tender interest in any one but herself.

In his short-sightedness he believed that when Stella was once fully convinced of this truth, she would turn to him with all her heart, and love him as he had always longed to be loved by her from the first hour of their meeting.

In the autumn of the year that had seen the lady under the magnolia tree "hung on the line," the Carhayeses went to a watering place on the south coast.

It was a dull, damp autumn, and there was something peculiarly dispiriting about the whole aspect of the place. The season had not set in thoroughly yet, for the atmosphere was of a warm lemonade order, which was supposed to be specially adapted to weak-lunged people in winter, consequently the time "being tame" in the vernacular, "lodgings to let" were the principal objects of interest in every window in every street.

It "did the boy good," Stella thought; the change of air and scene and custom conduced to a larger

consumption of "Robb's biscuits" and new milk, and naturally whatever tended to bring about this result was regarded as a desirable course by the mother. At once, therefore, when her husband had proposed the change, Stella had acceded to it, "though all places were equally void of interest to her now," she allowed to herself.

The region round about this town on the fair, shelving, verdure-covered coast was lovely and luxuriant to a remarkable degree. The lanes were flowering wildernesses. "Traveller's joy" was flung about in magnificent profusion on every hedge, and bank, and shrubby "combe," looking like slightly soiled snowballs or powder-puffs. The town itself was dull, by reason of there being no public promenade and no general rendezvous; but it was very beautiful in its dulness, and Stella, who was learning to do very well without society, was well satisfied with the sea and the scenery, and asked for nothing more.

To this same place, at the same season, some other old friends of ours came—Sir Roland and Miss Huntingdon, and Mr. Grey, in the pleased and gratified character of Miss Huntingdon's affianced.

The young pair were to be married very shortly. The *trousseau* was nearly ready, and what was equally important to Ethel, her new novel was nearly

ready also. She had avowed it to be quite impossible that she could be married until the completion of the book which she had on hand when Hugo first discovered that she was necessary to his existence. And this was not altogether due to her longing for further literary fame, though further literary fame was not at all obnoxious to her, before her marriage, but to her great desire to start free and independent of her husband in money matters.

In vain was Hugo lavish in the matter of settlements, and munificent in his protestations as to his desire that she should have unfettered control of his cheque-book. Ethel had tasted the "sweets of labour," as she called the money she had made by her own talents, and so, though it was pleasant to her to feel that she was going to marry a rich man, she was resolved that personally she would cost that rich man nothing.

Naturally, as Mrs. Arden and Hugo's maiden aunts had formed conclusive views as to her unworthiness of the high honour of being the wife of their relative, they "did not approve" of her determination.

"Probably the sum she makes is a paltry one. For my part I don't see anything at all praiseworthy in her thwarting your wish to be married soon, just that she may finish a book that no one will care to read," Mrs. Arden had kindly observed to Hugo, and Hugo

had snapped at his sister in reply, but nevertheless had suffered her remark to sink into his soul.

Just at this epoch they happened to be sailing in very smooth waters. Ethel, in a strange place, among strangers, with only her father and her lover with her, was rapidly regaining the light-hearted, youthful elasticity which social snubs had in a measure somewhat impaired. Hugo was happy in his knowledge of the fact that she would soon be able to declare herself ready to be his wife, for the wedding-dress was nearly made, and the novel was in the press; and Sir Roland was happier than either of them in the reflection that soon he would have no one to consider in the matter of expenditure but himself, as Mr. Grey had magnanimously declared that he did not want a penny with Ethel.

One day, while sauntering along on the sands at some little distance from the town, Ethel caught sight of a gentleman and lady some few yards ahead of them, and her face lightened up with pleasure, pure and unalloyed, instantaneously.

"Oh, Hugo! it's Arthur Carhayes and his wife; let us go and speak to them."

She had not seen Mr. Carhayes for a year, and so much had happened in the time that her heart began to flutter a little. A feeling of pleasant self-importance came over her. It would be nice to appear

before him after this long separation in the character of an engaged woman. She was only a girl, and there was a good deal of girlish vanity in her heart still.

But despite that *souçon* of girlish vanity, the principal feeling that pervaded the heart that had never been "in the wrong place" long, was one of intense delight, of real, good womanly pleasure, at seeing the husband and wife reunited. She could almost have fallen on Stella's neck, and wept out her gratification at this *finale* to an estrangement that, in her "salad days, when she was green of judgment," had seemed so light a thing to her.

"Do be sweet to them both, Hugo," she whispered, putting her hand on his arm, and almost pulling him along in her enthusiasm. "I am more glad than I can say to see Arthur Carhayes again, and to see him so."

They were close up to Mr. and Mrs. Carhayes in a moment or two; and, as they came up, and Ethel was about to speak, Mr. and Mrs. Carhayes turned, and the four pair of eyes met.

It is a hard thing to have to record it. It was a cruel thing to do. It was a bitter wrong to a woman who had been leal almost beyond the loyalty even of women to him. Mr. Carhayes simply raised his hat, and passed on: and Ethel stood till, pale, ashen-lipped, trembling, struck to the heart by such

ingratitude as she had never deemed a man capable of displaying.

It must be remembered that she did not know all ; that she could not see the reverse of the shield. He had done his wife so much wrong in his thoughts and by his acts, that he was perpetually now endeavouring in his repentance to offer her amends. He had discovered that she was jealous of Ethel, and that she thought badly of Ethel. He knew that it would not alter her opinion or decrease her jealousy of that young lady if he "told out the tale" truthfully of all that had passed between Ethel and himself, and so he sacrificed Ethel to his passion for his wife. That was all.

Not quite all, though. Ethel was not an isolated being to whom an injury done was a matter of no moment. The man who stood by her side, the man who had girded against and suffered in his soul about her hot partisanship for Arthur Carhayes, saw her passed by him now with what looked like contempt. It was natural to think that Hugo would triumph angrily over her—that he would promptly tell her that this was the "sort of treatment girls might expect from men who had no more regard for their reputations than," &c., &c. A burning sense of most undeserved shame seized the girl. How could he crush her so ! How could he seek to humiliate her

before the man who had honoured her above all women! Was Hugo of the calibre that can contend with such calamities as these? Was he of the order that can nobly bear ignoble suffering. In her terror she feared not.

She feared not in the fierce agony of the first few moments of enforced silence that ensued until the Carhayes had passed out of ear-shot. Then he began to speak; and she listened as one who is to hear her doom. The man whom she had gifted in her imagination with all the attributes of a god had proved a vain god after all. Why should she expect higher things of the handsome young fellow at her side, who was not endowed with half the mental power of Arthur Carhayes; Hugo would be almost justified in being cruel. At any rate, she anticipated cruelty.

"My darling," he said, quite cheerfully, "don't look so sad, Ethel; you are such a dear, little, generous-hearted, good thing yourself, that you can't conceive anybody else giving way under pressure. Carhayes has been so wrong about his wife, leaving her in the way he did, poor thing, that his conscience makes a coward of him."

"What must you think of me, Hugo?" She asked it with quivering lips, and a blushing bewildered face. "I don't know what I think of myself; what must you feel that he thinks of me?"

"I know what I think of you, Ethel."

"Hugo, if your sister had been here to see it, how she would have sat in the seat of the scornful over me!"

"Luckily, as you fancy that, she wasn't here, and didn't see it, and won't hear of it."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that men are more selfish than women, my darling, that's all. I am afraid we are all alike. I fear very much that if I knew you hated any woman, I should be quite capable of behaving to her as he did to you just now."

"Then you think Mrs. Carhayes hates me? If she only knew how little reason she has to do that!"

Meanwhile Arthur Carhayes and Stella had walked on hurriedly. It was no premeditated insult that he had offered to poor Ethel; but when he had turned and found himself face to face with her, the impulse to bow himself out of the difficulty without delay had been too strong for him. He liked Ethel too well to wish to see Stella cool to her. And, honestly, for a moment he had not considered how far more fatal to her feelings any coldness from him must be.

For a few seconds Stella suffered a doubt to ramble—poor Stella, who had never known what it was to doubt or distrust until Rupert Lyon had shown her

that he loved her without daring to tell her so. Then she tried to be just.

"You didn't know Miss Huntingdon was here when you proposed coming, did you, Arthur?"

"Indeed, no—on my honour, no. Why should we speak of it in this way?"

"She looked, to me, so happy, so triumphant; used she to look like that while—while I was away and so miserable?"

"Probably she looked happy and triumphant on account of that young fellow by her side. I quite expect to hear she is engaged to Mr. Hugo Grey."

"How could you pass her with only a bow?" Stella asked, with all a woman's inconsistency. "After staying in their house so long, and writing a book with her, it does seem so strange."

"Stella, I thought you wished me to pass on without speaking," he protested.

"I hardly knew what I wished; certainly not that you should be rude to her—or to any body else for that matter."

"I thought if I had stopped that you would have been cool and stiff, and that would have been worse than our passing on without a word."

"Arthur, I'll tell you something. Your mother put the idea in my head, and it was put into hers by

her knowledge of the Huntingdons. Did they get you down to this place to borrow money of you?"

"They didn't. Sir Roland being pressed, once asked me——"

"I see—to lend him money. I distrust such friendships." This she said bitterly, and ah! how she repented herself of the speech one moment afterwards when a child's gay voice rang out in the words—

"Look at Ninon, papa!"

CHAPTER XVI.

“Look at Ninon, papa! Look, look!” These were the words that fell ringingly on Stella’s ears; and, looking to her right, she saw Rupert Lyon standing still, puffing the pipe of peace, and contemplating the aquatic exploits of his little daughter.

Stella turned her gaze on the juvenile performer, and, in spite of her own years of married life, in spite of her own child, in spite of the severe training to which she had accustomed her thoughts and feelings, that sight was a revelation to her. Rupert Lyon had led a life of interest these past few years. He had passed through a period in which the teething agonies of that little morsel of humanity dancing on the sands had been more to him than all Stella’s love and despair, anguish and resignation.

Ninon, in a magpie costume of white muslin and black ribbons, indicative of mourning—Ninon, her little skirts held up high, in childish disregard of appearances—Ninon, with an autumnal sunbeam full

upon her, as she now solemnly advanced upon a sparkling pool of sea-water, and now hilariously retreated from the same, was a sight well worth looking at.

And she was Rupert Lyon's child. The recollection that she was Barbara's also came in time to save Stella from making a fool of herself. The choking ball of emotional sympathy had nearly formed itself in Mrs. Carhayes's round white throat, the tears that welled up from some never-to-be-dried spring of interest in Rupert had nearly fallen from her eyes, when the thought, "Where can *she* be?" occurred to her.

"We'll let bygones be bygones," Arthur Carhayes said, as collectedly as he could, in his endeavour to display that which men are apt to consider generosity and magnanimity to their wives, not duly considering that the past is beyond them altogether, and that they ought to be grateful for the present that is theirs.

"We'll let bygones be bygones, as you say, Arthur—and he is bygone." Stella spoke quickly, and moved on quickly. Rupert Lyon, absorbed in watching the gambols of his little child, had not seen the Carhayeses. "Why should I recall anything to him or to myself by speaking to him?" she thought; "if I do, either Arthur or myself must be humiliated.

Let us go on," she added, aloud, walking away firmly.

Her husband acquiesced in her decision. It was a point with him now to acquiesce in every decision of hers; he owed her so much recompense, he felt, for that bitterest wrong of all that he had done her. He had thought for a moment that there would have been an air of such grand trustfulness in his stopping to solicit a renewal of intercourse with the man of whom he had been jealous, just after his passing by Ethel in the way he had done. He owed so much to Stella!

He owed so much to Stella! Still he had a qualm when he thought of how he must have hurt that "fellow-labourer" of his just now. He knew so well that Ethel would never have surrendered anything to anybody's prejudices. He knew so well that his doing so now must have been doubly hurtful to her, since it was done before the man who loved her. And still, in spite of all this, he plumed himself upon the sacrifice he had made at Stella's shrine, and longed to make a still more acceptable one, by holding out the olive branch to Rupert Lyon.

They turned and looked at him when they were at what Stella deemed a safe distance. Standing there on the sea shore, he was clearly outlined, and Stella saw him as he was.

"He has aged and got stouter, don't you think?" Arthur said, in a low voice, and Stella shivered a little at the truthfulness of the criticism. It is so hard to a woman to see that a man has had the heart and the appetite to "get stouter" after loving her.

"Yes," she said, "he has altered."

Arthur made one more stride towards the imperial crown of perfect magnanimity.

"Not altered in mind towards us; let us go back and speak to him. His little girl will be a nice play-fellow for little Arthur—a wife in time, who knows?" Mr. Carhayes quite glowed with enthusiasm about the mastery he was obtaining over his own feelings.

"Heaven forbid it!" she said, sharply. There was something iniquitous to her in the suggestion. Rupert Lyon was too near to her for a marriage between her child and his to be possible.

He meanwhile, unconscious of the eyes that were bent on him in pain, in sadness, and in such love as only fills the heart of a woman once in her life, stood still, looking at his child—thinking of how he should best manage with her now—of what he should do with her while he was abroad this Winter—speculating as to whom he could entrust his little motherless girl to. For Barbara was dead.

Barbara was dead; and this miracle was wrought—he missed her. He actually wanted her back to look

after so many things that had gone wrong since she had died of bronchitis as conventionally as she had lived. His servants cheated him, his bills were heavier than they used to be, there was a permanent atmosphere of fustiness throughout his house. He really wanted Barbara back very much indeed.

"Come along, little one," he called out as he looked at his watch—"the time is ripe for sops."

"Ninon will have a sponge cake," the child cried, promptly; "Ninon will go and buy it in a shop;" and she paddled away in the direction of the town with a rapidity that soon brought her abreast with Mr. and Mrs. Carhayes.

"He is close behind us, dear."

"Walk faster, Arthur."

"Speak to the child."

She shook her head, and increased her pace; and then Arthur Carhayes knew that the object of his life would never be gained—knew that his wife's heart would never be his—knew that he had been foolish as well as cruel in getting her to marry him.

How glad she was to find herself safely back at their hotel, with her boy playing on the carpet at her feet! How ashamed she was to find that these years of wifehood and motherhood had passed over her head, leaving her weak as ever in the power of casting out the passion of her life! How she girded against

the thought that Mrs. Lyon was possibly even now awaiting her husband's return to dinner in some room in that hotel!

"Does he call her 'dear'? Does he consult her about his work and tell her everything, and let her share his triumphs?"

She had been so strong in running away from the temptation which the sight of him was to her, and now, although she was safely in her domestic lair, she was not satisfied; she kept on peering out from the window that commanded the grand entrance to the hotel—peering out with a half hope, half dread that she might see him come sauntering in with that old well-known slouch of his, that was better than any other man's most martial stride.

How would it be if she met him face to face, and could not avoid him? She knew how it would be in one way—it would be agony; but that was of no consequence compared to how it would be outwardly. It would be "so inconsistent" to behave in any way which she could possibly think of. She wished heartily that they had remained quietly at Carhayes Place, and still she kept on peering through the window.

Presently she saw the two men who between them had marred her life, come into the yard of the hotel together—Rupert Lyon and her husband—with something of the indescribable friendship and intimacy of

old days hanging about them. Ninon was with them, scattering herself freely around; and there was an absence on the part of Rupert Lyon, of all thought about her (Stella) apparently that eased her mind, even while it mortified her.

In another minute Arthur was bursting into her room, with something of the ardour and *bonhomie* of former days.

"You mustn't scold, dear," he cried, coming over and looking wistfully into her eyes as he said it. "I met Rupert just now in the library, and we shook hands without a word—and I have asked him to dinner. He has lost his wife, poor fellow, and is alone here with his little girl. You are not vexed?"

"Lost his wife!"

"Yes; she is dead."

Dead! And it was for this woman, who had a will so weak that she could let herself lapse out of life even when *he* was living, that he had left Stella Orme!

"I can't realise it, Arthur," she said piteously; "it seems so hard on every one."

"I think he is cut up about it," Arthur said, complacently—it was so delightful to him to have clasped hands once more with Rupert without being called upon to account for his former extraordinary proceedings.

"Very sad to be left with the charge of that little girl." Stella blessed that portion of her education which had taught her to be facile in the utterance of conventionalities.

"You are not vexed at my having asked him to dinner?" He took her chin in his hand and turned her face to the light.

"Vexed? Oh, no!"

"He made such kind inquiries about you, and expressed such a desire to see you, that there would have been something invidious in my abstaining from giving him an invitation."

"Don't excuse yourself, Arthur: I shall be very glad to see him." She compelled herself to say it very steadily, though she foresaw that she would be sharply tried by the indifferent spirit in which he was coming to meet her.

"He evidently knows nothing about our—that mistake we made, dear," Arthur went on, explaining.

"He would never be feeble enough to betray his knowledge—he is much too clever, and much too kind," she said hastily, with a sudden contempt for that easy grace of Arthur's which made him put the best construction on all things now, "I must order some change in the dinner, I suppose."

"And make yourself look your best," he whispered,

coaxingly; "let it be seen that you have not altered for the worse in any way during your married life."

"There is no need for us to care what he thinks," she said, a little sternly. Arthur's insatiable vanity in her personal appearance struck harshly upon her, now that he wanted to justify his pride of proprietorship before the only man for whom she cared to deck her beauty. And still, harshly as this desire on Arthur's part jarred upon her, she did go to her room and strive to make herself "look her best," as her husband desired.

She was waiting by the fire in their drawing-room, alone, when Mr. Lyon was ushered in; and her "I'm very glad to see you" was spoken with the precise emphasis she would have used to a casual acquaintance. There was just that exact amount of warmth that a hostess would infuse into her words of welcome. But, in spite of her composure, she was taking agitated mental notes of the black studs, of the wedding ring on the little finger of his left hand, of all the insignia of his widowed state.

"My children, coming to say good night to me," she explained, as her boy, carried by one nurse, and an infant (whom it has not been found necessary to mention, since she was simply a girl), carried by another, came into the room.

"Children! Good Heavens! have you more than one?"

"Yes; these are both mine."

"Ah, it proves to me that it is a very long time since I saw you last," he said, leaning his shoulder against the mantelpiece, and looking down on the pretty domestic picture of the mother playing with her children; "but time passes so quickly that I felt staggered at first." And then he held a finger out to the baby. And then Arthur came in and tossed the boy up to the ceiling, and the embarrassment was at an end.

"I have asked a very good fellow, the curate of one of the churches here, to make the fourth at dinner, Stella," her husband said, pausing presently in his play with his son. "He is by way of being musical."

"What a bore he will be if he insists on proving his prowess at the piano to-night!" Stella answered, shrugging. "I hate 'a little music'—don't you?" she appealed to Rupert Lyon.

"Not nearly with such virulence as I hate a great deal. Amateurs who can sing, and will sing, ought to be destroyed."

"Clearly I have made a mistake in asking Smith, but I thought——" Mr. Carhayes pulled himself up on the brink of the statement that he thought an

outsider would be a preventive of something like awkwardness in this reunion of "the three" who had been so near and so divided.

"Oh, it is just as well he should be here," Stella hurriedly responded—responded to all the possibilities in Arthur's speech—to all the possibilities in Arthur's sudden cessation from words. Of course she was very stupid, very weak, very much wanting in self-possession to do this; but it is hard to be strong and brilliantly self-possessed, when the "old love" comes to the fore in the way Rupert Lyon had come to-day.

Smith came in presently, in a fluster from parish work that he had hurried over at the last, though he had been devising divers ways of doing it unhurriedly all the week—a lengthy, large young man, about whom nothing need be said, save that he made an acceptable fourth—acceptable, at least, to Arthur Carhayes, who was bent on offering his wife the further reparation of full unfettered conversational intercourse with her old lover.

"Lyon, take my wife." Carhayes said it as if it were quite in the order of things that Rupert, being present, should have the first claim to Stella; and, as if it were quite in the order of things—as if it did not give him one pang of memory, one thrill through the nerves of his heart—Rupert went up to her, and

offered her his arm, and she put her hand on it, wondering whether or not they felt "one bit—one bit," these men who had made her suffer so.

It was but a step from one room to the other. There was no time for a word by the way; nor was there opportunity for even stilted condolences being offered at the round table that put the four in such pleasant proximity to each other; but late in the evening, when Mr. Smith was declaring himself to be a "Vagabond" in a way that did not conjure up a vision of Santley, the moment came when Rupert's dead wife must be referred to.

Mrs. Carhayes was standing at the window, looking out at the lapping waves, that came up in endless succession on the sloping silver sands stretched along at the bottom of the series of terraces—standing, holding back the heavy curtains in one hand, seemingly half supporting herself against it, in an attitude that was indicative rather of weariness than repose. Still "What grace there was in it!" Rupert thought, as an artist, not as a lover.

"I am glad Fate threw us three here together to-day, Mrs. Carhayes."

She relinquished her hold of the curtains, and stood up with her hands lightly clasped before her. Lovely as the face was that was turned towards him, he did for a moment regret that he had disturbed the *pose*

that might have served him for a study of "Tired" or "Weary."

"I am sorry for the Fate that has sent you here alone," she said, and her words did not ring falsely even in her own ears.

"I am not alone—you know, I have little Ninon with me. By-the-bye, Mrs. Carhayes, let me bespeak your liking for my little girl."

"She seemed a sweet little child," Stella said, meaninglessly.

"Seemed! have you seen her?"

"Yes; we saw her dancing in the shallows on the sands to-day."

"You passed us?"

"Yes."

"And did not speak to me; that was not kind. Did you not wish to see me?"

"Yes, yes, I am very glad of course." Stella was getting impatient. "Tell me about your sweet little Ninon. What a fanciful name!"

"She is not so much 'sweet' as 'bewitching'—a mixture of demon and angel at present. I wish you would advise me about her; I can't leave her to servants, and I can't part with her."

"I should advise a governess."

"My dear Mrs. Carhayes, if I got a resident governess young enough to sympathise with Ninon,

the society in which I live would pronounce the decree of marriage upon us before she had been in the house a month."

"There is that to be thought of." She spoke very softly, and looked out at the lapping waves again.

"That? Do you mean what people might say?"

"No, no; I mean there is marriage to be thought of. A mother would be the best friend you could give your little girl."

"Oh, I shall never marry again," he said, carelessly. Evidently he was utterly unconscious of the deep feelings Stella was investing in the subject.

Mr. Smith meanwhile had gone triumphantly through "The Vagabond," and was now avowing in very decided language, to an air that had all the heart and soul and strength of old English song-music in it, that "Love's a tyrant and a slave, a torment and a treasure."

"I shall never marry again," he repeated—"perhaps as much for the child's sake as my own. I will not give myself the temptation of loving any other human being as I love my little Ninon."

"You don't even ask for my boy."

"I beg your pardon, I inquired very minutely about him, and had a long list of his perfections from his papa. He seems to be more like dear old Archie than he is like you."

"Yes, he has all the Carhayes beauty," she said proudly.

"And that is very great, as every one must admit. There is this fact about the Carhayes beauty that renders it so valuable—it appeals both to the cultivated and uncultivated; still I should have liked your boy to have resembled you." Again he looked at her critically, and repeated to himself that indeed she had "beauty such as never woman wore."

"Rupert, will you have some soda and brandy——"

"And a cigar on the balcony—yes," Rupert assented.

"No, no, on the terrace below; then Stella can come down with us. We generally take a prow down there of an evening. You smoke, I hope?" turning to Mr. Smith, to whom Stella was uttering sweet falsehoods respecting his singing.

They were none of them sorry that Mr. Smith excused himself—none of them sorry, now that the awkwardness was over, to find themselves alone together—those three who had so strangely met, so unwisely loved, and so sadly parted.

Once more they sauntered out together in the sweet evening light, the two men smoking, and Stella walking between them as of old. She did not care so much about belonging to another man, now that "he" no longer belonged to another woman. He could and

should be first friend now to Arthur and herself, with no one coming between them.

"I'll tell you whom I saw here to-day," Rupert languidly stated, after five minutes' silent puffing—"that pretty Miss Huntingdon and a young fellow called Grey, whom she is going to marry."

"We saw her too," Arthur said, as Stella did not.

"There was always something uncommonly good about that girl," Mr. Lyon went on; "she had been a trifle distorted by her early education and surroundings, but I always felt that she would be sure to right herself as time went on. I hope he is a good fellow, that man she is going to marry; do you know him, Carhayes?"

"I've seen a good deal of him."

"Has he anything in him?"

"At least he has the power you all have of appreciating Miss Ethel Huntingdon," Stella exclaimed. And then the contrast between the amplitude of Arthur's trust in her now, and the narrowness of hers respecting Ethel, struck her with a force that hurt her.

THE END OF VOL. II.

